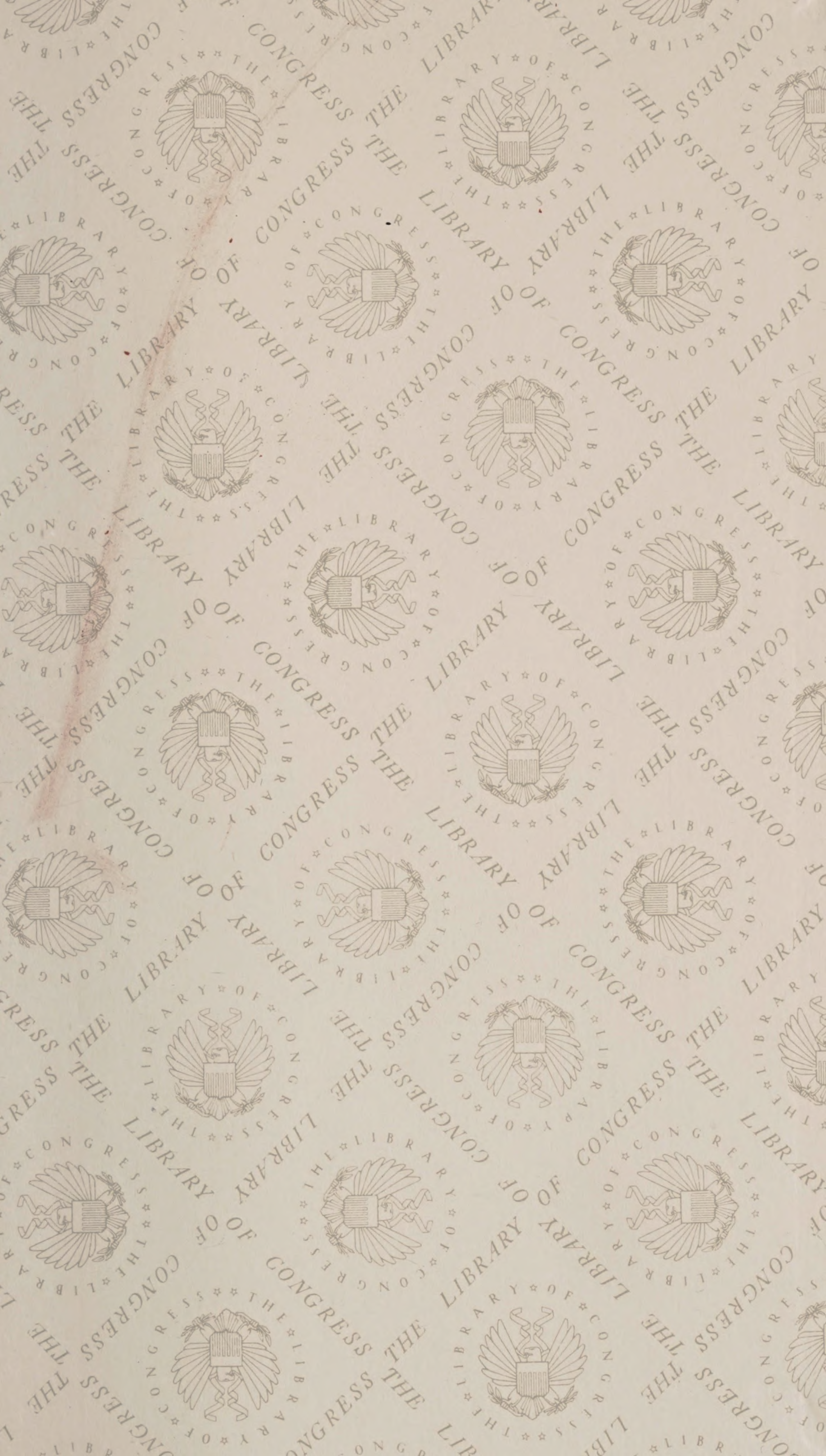
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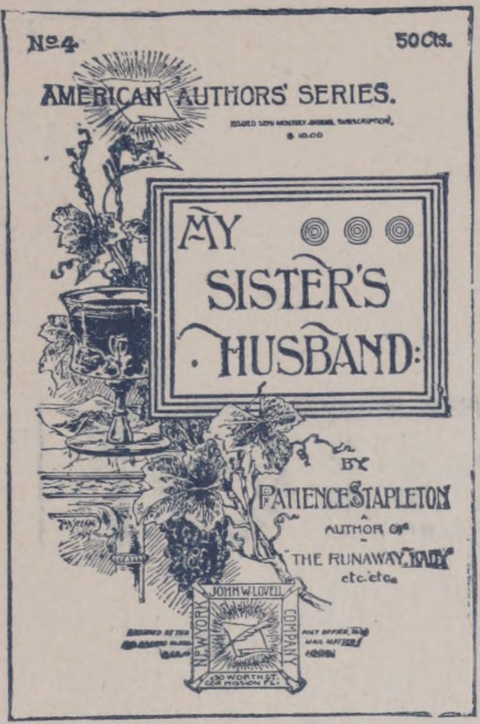

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CONTENTS.

PROLOGUE.

EPISODES AT ST. MATHILDE.

PAGE.
EPISODE I.—Monsieur, Madam, and Madam's Brother, 5
" II.—In a Rose Garden 14
" III.—Firelight Reflections 22
" IV.—Indiscretion of the Accused 31

I. BACK PAGES.

CHAPTER I.—Advent of a Heroine 42
" II.—Inside History 50
" III.—The Misses Bronson 64
" IV.—Cloudland 80

II. PROBLEMATICAL INSANITY.

CHAPTER I.—Mademoiselle Clothilde 94
" II.—Two on a Tower 107
" III.—Beginning to Plot 116
" IV.—Plans of Campaign 122

III. GROUNDS MORE RELATIVE.

CHAPTER I.—Potter's Gulch 129
" II.—Over the Coffee Cups 135
" III.—Confidential 149
" IV.—Underground 160

IV. AT THE END OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.—Revelations in a Dog Cart 169
" II.—Francois Purchases Soap 182
" III.—Old Acquaintances Meet 196
" IV.—Decision 208

MISS MARSTON.

EPISODE I.

MONSIEUR, MADAM, AND MADAM'S BROTHER.

THERE arrived one day at St. Mathilde, Monsieur, Madam, and Madam's brother.

As you travel inland from Marseilles, you will find St. Mathilde, a sleepy, red-roofed, ancient town, smothered in roses, and by the side of a distressingly placid river. There are few commendable or striking features about the village—it is a flat, unprofitable place, with a few cottages of remarkable similarity, an old chateau and a disproportioned, faintly-painted inn. The inn frowns down on the cottages from its superior height, and the chateau, which is haunted, frowns down on the inn. So fear-ful is the frown from the chateau that one finding oneself in St. Mathilde frequently wonders how the roses can bloom in the very shadow of it. The chateau is a gray, ponderous affair, with many hollow eyes and crumbling walls. Two hundred years ago there lived in this great building the Marquis de Maintenon, connected with whom, it is related, there were matters of a curious nature. It is known, even at this late period, that the Marquis had a very beautiful daughter, who, being beloved by a courtier of the King, much against the Marquis' sanction, one night stole away from the gray chateau and fled with her handsome lover to Paris. There was a year of gaiety and a child. One day it so occurred, although tradition does not state why, that the young man, the young woman and the offspring of this hasty, yet evidently happy, marriage, returned to the chateau. The Marquis, like many of his kind, was a man of terrible temper, and although the interview which followed on the arrival of the two was never repeated correctly to St. Mathilde ears, the very horrible fact remains that all four were found dead in the chateau the morning following the young couple's arrival from Paris. Signs of a terrible struggle on the great stairway were distressingly evident, and at the foot were the dead bodies of both the Marquis and his son-in-law. One of the stories told a St. Mathilde gossip by an authority was to the effect that Monsieur the Marquis first slew his daughter, dashed the infant's head against a wall, and fought with his relative by marriage until both considerately died and completed the tragedy. The gossip, hearing this ghastly tale, spread it diligently around the village, and, with the necessary and customary embellishments, it descended with the years. You may hear at St. Mathilde to-morrow that the terrible Marquis slaughtered thirteen servants, two sons-in-law, four daughters, children innumerable, and would have fatally wounded the King himself had he been in the vicinity of the destructive sword.

When you stop at St. Mathilde the first person to greet you on alighting from the diligence is Pierre Conde, a lineal descendant of an historic soldier, who will conduct you within his inn, set the most delicious of lunches before you, and acquaint you with the story of the chateau while you dine. One by one the villagers will look in at the door, chat briefly with Madam Conde, who always knits, and then go to their red-roofed houses or to the unproductive looking vineyard. Nothing of interest ever occurs in St. Mathilde—save, possibly, a death.

Yet there arrived one day, Monsieur, Madam, and Madam's brother.

The ever present alertness, restlessness, and even rompishness of Madam and Madam's brother, stamped them Americans. Monsieur was stately, somewhat aged, as the gray aspect of his hair and beard would tend to show, and was, evidently, an Englishman. Madam was young, possibly not yet twenty, with a small, lithe, well-knit figure, on which the brown tourist's dress was seen to admirable advantage. She had a quick, bright step, and a pleasant little laugh, such as seldom fell on St. Matilde ears. Her brother, probably three years her elder, was a strong, bronzed, handsome young fellow, whose carriage was that of a soldier and who was totally dissimilar to this interesting young woman. He met Monsieur and Madam in Marseilles—the first meeting with his sister for many, many years Monsieur was informed.

There was a great deal of baggage, but, compared to its proportion, a too great amount of cursing from Didier, the porter, who was forced to carry it all up the narrow, tortuous staircase, while Pierre told the story of the chateau, while Madame Conde knit, and while the villagers sated their curiosity.

During the luncheon Madam remarked that she was grnatly interested in the chateau. Indeed she had learned of it in Marseilles.

" The fame of St. Mathilde chateau has spread to Marseilles," remarked Conde, nodding toward his wife.

" Marseilles is at last excited over the St. Mathilde chateau," nodded Madam Conde to the gossip.

" All Marseilles is coming to see the chateau," proclaimed the gossip, and shortly the news returned to Madam Conde, after its circuitous travels, that all Marseilles would arrive on Monday to inspect the great curiosity.

To-morrow, Madam said, she would be pleased to visit this historic chateau, and now, having finished their truly excellent repast, would Monsieur the landlord accompany Monsieur and Madam to their apartments? Ah, that was Monsieur the landlord's most happy office. Whereupon there was a great deal of bowing, a little scolding, an excited rushing up and down the narrow staircase, and finally the usual evening quietness of St. Mathilde.

The sun was setting, and Madam threw open the north window· In the garden below, Monsieur her brother, was smoking a cigar. He saw her and nodded. Great yellow, slanting bars of sunlight reflected in the eyes of the massive stone heap on the hill, while its crumbling battlements stood coldly out against the crimsoning sky. Monsieur went to the window, and leaned over the back of Madam's chair, his breath fanning her neck, and whisking a lock ot her brown hair over her eyes. She pushed it away somewhat irritably, with a nervous little gesture, which Monsieur, who loved her very dearly, did not notice. She was looking at the sunset of a day—he at the sunrise of her womanliness.

“Do,” he said, finally, “why did you come here?”

She merely pointed to the magnificent ruins bathed in the last warm glow of day, and said:

“Can you ask, when you look on that?”

“But one may observe sunsets anywhere—in Marseilles, England, America, or—Iceland, if you will.”

“Not such a one as this. Here, you may see nothing but the light passing into darkness, the great holy glow of the sun's last rays. In Marseilles your sunsets are mingled with the cries of fish-venders, with the hurrying of the people and the never-ending echoes of the sea. As for England, America or Iceland, one cannot enjoy the sunset without travelling to it, and I have no desire to leave France just yet. Besides, elsewhere, there is the sunset and the world—here, nothing but quietness, simplicity and—well, the sunset. Then that old chateau—what glorious possibilities for the artist. In Marseilles they told us it had been sketched but once; why, I shall spend days with my easel in that grand building, and my thoughts with its mysteries."

"Then the picture is to be the effort of your life?" And he smiled slightly as he stroked her straying hair.

"Yes—the effort of my life. Do you think it so serious a matter to stay in this quaint unknown place for the sake of art?"

She pouted bewitchingly, just as she had pouted that rainy day in London, three months, before, when she dropped a package in the muddy street. He remembered how grateful she seemed when he picked it up and met his eyes for the first time. But three months, and now she was his wife! She loved him, this dainty little American of twenty summers—loved him, a man of forty!

He leaned further over the chair and gently kissed her forehead—almost reverently.

"Bless you, my dear, you may remain in this bower of roses all summer if you wish."

Monsieur in the garden had finished his cigar. He walked toward the house, and looking up at the form in the window called;

"Good-night, Do."

"Good-night."

Then he disappeared in the narrow doorway.

"Do you know," said Monsieur, "that I am inclined to feel jealous of that handsome brother of yours? Why, ever since your Marseilles meeting you have not, until to-night, given me a half-hour alone with you."

"He has been a very dear brother," she said simply, "and I shall ever love him."

Whereupon Monsieur kissed her once again, and both watched the silent shadows gather more deeply around the distant chateau with its hollow eyes and crumbling battlements until the darkness came and stars began their nightly watch over red-roofed St. Mathilde.

EPISODE II.

IN A ROSE GARDEN.

THE stay of Monsieur, Madam, and Madam's brother at St. Mathilde had been prolonged. Madam, who, it was developed to the villagers, was an artist of pretension, showed more than ordinary interest in the chateau, and was transferring, with remarkable skill and attention to detail, the more historic portions of the wonderful building, to her canvas. A laborer, who had been fortunate enough to obtain a view of the "haunted staircase" so deftly and artistically reproduced by Madam, was enthusiastic in its praise. He had never, he said, seen its equal even in Marseilles—and where, *Mon Dieu!* were there paintings to compare with those of Marseilles?

It became noticed that, as the visit was prolonged, Monsieur was left greatly to his own devices for amusement. At precisely eight o'clock each morning—a disgustingly late hour with the villagers—Madam, with her neat little tin box in one hand and a substantial, though inelegant umbrella in the other, left the inn for the chateau. She was invariably followed by her brother, who had in charge an easel, a rug of Turkish pattern and, usually, a lunch. When the lunch was not carried, Madam and her brother returned to the inn at noon. Frequently their stay was prolonged until quite late in the day. For a time Monsieur accompanied, carrying, like an obedient servant, the tin box. But, after a while, as conversation usually fell between Madam and her brother, each of whom lifted their very expressive eyebrows, did Monsieur venture a word, he became convinced that he was the addition forming the crowd and discreetly withdrew. It was noticed, too, that Monsieur grew daily paler, evidently weaker, and there were those in the village who shook their heads at the roses, and predicted that Monsieur was not long for St. Mathilde, not long for Marseilles—in short, not long for the world.

One of the most magnificent of St. Mathilde gardens was that belonging to Oliver Ferri, near the vineyards. While absent, Oliver's brown, sturdy son Francois—a handsome lad—was left to care for the roses. And it was in this direction that Monsieur, unattended, was wont to walk. Monsieur, one day, leaning over the gate, chatted with Francois, and stated he admired roses. Whereupon, returning to the inn, the English gentleman was surprised at being presented with the most exquisite bouquet it had been possible for Francois to find. This became a custom, for every day thereafter, on awakening, Monsieur inhaled the delicious exotic of fresh flowers from Oliver Ferri's garden. Soon did Francois begin to accompany Monsieur on little pilgrimages to the wood, the river, and—infrequently—the chateau. A strong friendship was formed between the two. Monsieur had much to tell, in his delightful way, of England and America, while Francois, in his poor fashion, had much to tell of St. Mathilde, and to show, unconsciously, that his humdrum life, enlightened by dreams of coming greatness, was beautiful even in its simplicity.

Madam found time to ask one day: “Who is that boy?”

They were in the garden of the inn: Monsieur and Francois intent on a new-fishing rod sent from Marseilles; Madame and brother standing by the gate. For weeks she had taken but passing notice of Francois—scarcely even of her husband, and the question came with a directness almost cruel.

“Who are you?” she asked impulsively, walking toward the youth. He, accustomed to seeing but not hearing this young woman, whom he knew as Monsieur’s wife, shrank back in confusion, while Monsieur looked up amazed from his seat.

“Who are you?”

There was a painful pause. Madam, slender as she was, all at once seemed a dragon to the boy.

“If you please,” he answered as timidly as though he were a city newsboy taken to task for stealing, “I am simply Francois—the son of Oliver Ferri.”

"And who may Oliver Ferri be? I know him not. What are his merits? You seem to gauge everything by honesty in St. Mathilde—is he honest?"

Madam was no longer a dragon—she was a wicked, insulting woman. Francois raised his flushed face proudly, and regarded her with his great, round eyes.

"My father honest! What reason have you to question his honesty, not knowing him?"

The boy, hot-tempered as well as timid, stood boldly before Madam, and his breath came very fast. A portion of his blue blouse had fallen from the neck, revealing a smooth expanse of firm, brown skin; his chest rose and fell angrily.

"You are a little fool," said Madam.

Monsieur sprang from his seat. "Do' what does this mean? Why do you speak to this lad in such a manner? It is unjust, cruel. Francois is my friend."

"You did not account the peasantry of England and Germany your friends—rather the opposite, I fancied. Has St. Mathilde made you so regardless in selecting your associates?"

Madam's query seemed to strike her husband dumb for a time. Here was a role he had never seen her play. He could hardly comprehend it, and passed his hands over his white brow, as though to brush away a mist. To be ignored was cruel, yet to be forgiven. To be mocked was like a stab in the dark—a stab for which he was wholly unprepared. While Monsieur fought with his emotions there was the stillness of the dawn in the garden, and the tableau, as viewed by the surprised inn-keeper in the door-way, very effective.

Finally Monsieur spoke, lowly and clearly, with an uncontrollable tremor in his voice, which unconsciously told a story that touched even the unsympathetic heart of the brother at the gate.

"I cannot understand you," said he, "for I have never seen you like this. You may have been severely crossed by some affair—some accident, perhaps—but you are not right in venting your ill-nature on my little friend, whom I esteem so highly. He has done much to lighten the melancholy trouble you have cast upon me, Do. I hated to think you were slighting me—even forgetting me—but as the time passed on this belief began to rule; I could not shake it off. We have made a mistake, it is evident, a dreadful mistake. I think it would be well if you went in now. After tea I should like to speak with you if," he looked up appealingly—" if you do not mind."

His words seemed to cast a sort of sorrowful, melancholy spell over the garden and its occupants. It was very still, and the soft breeze that came from the south did not even shake the leaves. Monsieur, having finished, turned toward the fallen fishing-rod, while Madam, followed by the ever-present brother, walked silently toward the inn. When Francois, who felt strangely awed, resumed his seat beside Monsieur, he noted a mist in the great gray eyes, and finally a tear rolled down Monsieur's beard. Slipping to the ground he drew the rod from the man's white hands and clasped them in his own.

" Forgive me, Monsieur," he pleaded, " for what I have said—for what I shall say. But oh, Monsieur, she does not love you—this your wife, Monsieur, cares not for how she pains you."

"God forgive her, Francois—she has deeply pained me." His face grew whiter, and the deep-furrowed lines contracted and twitched as he arose and stretched his hands out appealingly, as though speaking to some great, holy, unseen being. "She has pained me, and, heaven forgive me," he whispered, "I fear she does not love." Then he sank on the bench, and leaned despairingly upon his hands, while the boy knelt beside him. A bright crimson glare shot from the sky and fell slanting through the trees like a bar of slowly-cooling iron. Then it faded; a soothing, welcome twilight came over St. Mathilde, and in the inn garden a bird sang low and sweet.

EPISODE III.

FIRELIGHT REFLECTIONS.

WHEN Monsieur became so very ill he could not leave his room, a sort of conciliation, or endurance, was established between Madam and Francois. The boy was not to be thrown from his desire to show appreciation of Monsieur's kindness, and persisted, despite rebuffs from Madam's brother and Madam herself, in daily bringing the choicest of St. Mathilde roses to brighten the darkened room in which Monsieur lay—-roses that only faded and died in the hot, medicinated air. Monsieur was for the greater part of the time unconscious, yet in half-delirium called for Francois, until the Marseilles physician who was attending, commanded the boy's presence at the bedside. He was a faithful attendant, the brown, rugged, peasant-boy, who cheerfully exchanged the pleasant days in the rose-garden for the hot, unhealthy hours in the sick chamber.

So Madam and Francois endured one another. Madam, who had finally given up the sketching trips, watching, with the zealous boy-nurse, the life of Monsieur as it slowly ebbed. It was a peculiar case, Monsieur the physician said—the most puzzling, the most baffling, he would confess, with which he had ever come in contact. He sent, therefore, for a learned colleague and waited, with plain uneasiness, his arrival, for Monsieur was sinking fast.

* * * * *

A great storm swept inland. At St. Mathilde the wind hurried, with an ever-increasing voice, around the corners of the red-roofed cottages, stripped the rose-bushes of their perfumed burdens and hurled them, with swift fury, against the window-panes and doors. At the chateau were many noises on the wind-riffed parapet and in the stone-sided apertures. It seemed as though the ghosts of Monsieur the Marquis and his ill-fated relatives were re-enacting the thrilling scene of a bygone age.

At the inn there were horrible rattlings of shutters and rocking of chimneys. When the rain began to fall it came like a huge ocean suddenly lifted high in the air and carried directly to St. Mathilde, where it descended and flooded chateau, garden and streets. It was a terrible, noiseful night, and Francois, who sat within the dimly-lighted chamber of Monsieur, shuddered and silently prayed.

When Madam came in from a brief rest, Francois was half asleep. Madam was unusually—remarkably—tender that night. Francois remembered it long afterward, so very tender.

"Poor boy," said she, "you are wearing yourself out. Go and rest a little—I will watch."

Monsieur turned uneasily and opened his eyes. It seemed to cost him a great effort—a very great effort. Madam, noting he was rousing, said she would prepare his medicine, and quitted the room. Monsieur's eyes seemed to follow her to the door. Then his hands, by a great effort, were placed on the boy's knees.

"Francois," he whispered painfully, "do not leave me; whatever happens do not leave me. The medicine—it is burning me, you must—" Then he sank on the pillows, unconscious, and Francois, alarmed, was attempting to arouse him when Madam entered with the tray.

"I will wait," she said," until he wakes again. Where is Monsieur le Docteur?"

"Monsieur his friend did not come, and he has gone to Marseilles to consult; the storm has detained him."

"Well, I will watch; you may go and rest."

Francois started to leave. At the door, Monsieur's words, which had been haunting him ever since their utterance, came over him with a double significance: "Whatever happens do not leave me." Hesitatingly he turned; finally walked irresolutely to the bedside.

Madam glanced up in surprise.

"Why do you not go?" she asked.

"I—I had rather stay—believe me, Madam, I desire to stay. I am not fatigued—neither drowsy nor fatigued—I will remain."

The dangerous color he had noted in the garden came again to Madam's cheeks.

"Stupid," she said, "you cannot stay. This matter has gone too far. He is my husband, and I will attend to him."

Francois hardly heeded. He only realized that Monsieur had said he should not go, and that he must not go. Dumbly, as though he had hardly comprehended Madam's words, he stood before her.

"Go," she said finally, rising and pointing to the door; "I do not want you—go!"

Yet he moved not, and Madam, upon whose face the dangerous color seemed to glow like a furnace stepped toward him, as though, with her slight strength, she would force him from the room.

"Do not come near me—I would not like to strike you; you, so beautiful, so weak and—so wicked." He never knew just why he added those two words. They seemed to force themselves through his teeth.

"Wicked!"

There might have been a million thoughts running through Madam's little head as she iterated the adjective. From her face one would judge she was both puzzled and terrified, so strange a look did it wear.

"You know something?" she said, half wildly, suddenly grasping the boy's wrists. "You have learned something, you French dog. You are not the idiot you seem—I should have discovered that long ago. *He* has told you something—what is it?"

"Take your hands from mine," he said, pushing her rudely backward. "You are right, I do know something—Monsieur has been poisoned."

There was a tremendous noise at the door just then, and someone called for Francois. Yet it seemed not to divert the attention of either woman or boy, for, when a messenger entered, there were both, standing mutely in the centre of the room, looking steadfastly into each other's eyes.

Oliver Ferri had, while lost in the storm, fallen from his horse and been seriously hurt. It was a matter of life and death, and Francois was entreated to go at once to the bedside.

"Monsieur is very ill; I cannot leave him!"

"And thy father at the door of death—ungrateful boy! He calls thee every minute of his suffering existence."

"I cannot go."

"He lives but to see you."

There was a pause.

"You hear?" questioned Francois of Madam, "He lives but to see me. I must go—it is my duty. Even Monsieur, whom I regard, whom I esteem, whom I love, must wait. He has asked me not to leave—but I cannot obey."

The messenger had gone. At the door Francois turned, rushed to the table where the medicine tray lay, and, opening the window, flung it, with its contents, into the garden. There was a sudden gust of wind and a damp cloud of rain apparent for a moment, during which the lamp was extinguished. He closed the window. Then they stood in the firelight these two. Shadows danced, grew and diminished on the walls. A great flame swept up the chimney. The storm howled, rattling the window and swishing the boughs of trees. A sheet of lightning lit the room with its glare for a moment, turning every article white during the brief time it lingered. Madam, although usually so self-contained, was in truth little more than a girl, and the remarkable suddenness with which the occurrences presented themselves to her mind vented itself in a low, terrified expression, as she sank into the large arm-chair beside the bed. The boy strode over to her—they might have been brother and sister, so young were they and, in the firelight, so strikingly similar.

"Listen," he said, gazing sternly into her eyes—eyes from which all hauteur, arrogance, coldness, had departed; eyes in which there was nothing but an agonizing, mute appeal for mercy. "I shall come back here—come as quickly as I may. I am but a boy, a peasant, a French dog if you will, but I have eyes and ears—I can think, can reason You or *he*, or both of you, are committing a horrible crime. Do you realize what you are doing? Do you know that you may earn the title of murderess?"

He had again reached the door and again turned. She arose, totteringly, and staggered toward the firelight—so weak, so terrified, even so childish. Had this boy, this dog, as she had termed him, no pity? Had he so much will? When she had reached the rug he was at her side again, had seized her wrists, and was looking down at her white, terrified face.

"They use the knife for criminals in France," he said fiercely, "*turn back!*" Then he rushed toward the door, and was this time gone. For a moment she was as modeled marble. The one sentence had seemed to more clearly show than all the strange events of the night the enormity of the pending crime. Then, with a horrible suddenness, another flash from the storm-swept heavens, a deep groan from the sufferer on the bed, the loud re-echoing crash of the great inn door as it closed behind Francois, and she sank weakly upon the rug.

EPISODE IV.

INDISCRETION OF THE ACCUSED.

In a half-darkened room at the inn, Madam sat waiting. She was dressed wholly in black, and was a sombre, miserable, yet determined, woman. Her brother, looking from the window to the north, seemed lost in thought. Finally two entered, one the innkeeper, the other, a tall, brown man with a military bearing. Madam and Madam's brother looked quickly up, and Madam arose.

"It is he you sent for—Monsieur, the Chief of the *Gens d'armes*," said the little innkeeper, bowing himself out. Madam motioned the newcomer to a seat, but he remained standing. Then she attempted to speak but failed, and looked appealingly toward her brother.

"We have sent for you," said the latter, "because we feel your services are needed. There has been a crime committed."

"That much I already believe—I would have come; you need not have sent for me."

Madam started. "Is the belief general?" she questioned.

"No," returned the Chief coldly, signalling the brother to continue.

"Monsieur, the husband of Madam, was this morning found dead, directly beneath the window of his chamber. For some time Monsieur has been ill, the victim, as we believed—Madam, myself, and the physician—of a slow, destroying fever. So serious did his condition become that Monsieur the doctor yesterday went to Marseilles for assistance. Hardly could he have left the village when a great delirium began and Monsieur had to be held, on several occasions, in the bed. Toward night he calmed. Attending him was one Francois Ferri, a son of Oliver Ferri, whom you doubtless know. Prior to his illness Monsieur met Francois and seemed to be greatly attached to him—an unfortunate attachment, you will say, when I have finished. During his illness, particularly in delirium, Monsieur's attitude grew to one of dislike against the boy. Not wishing to offend Francois, Madam concealed the state of affairs as long as was possible, and allowed him to remain, thinking, perhaps, Monsieur's attitude would again change as suddenly as before. During his delirium yesterday, Monsieur became violent whenever the boy approached the bedside. Last night Madam requested him to depart. He refused and, in a rage, struck her. The bruise you may yet see. Then, as fate willed, the boy was summoned home by the illness of his father. Before going he again struck Madam, and when I entered later—having been detained at a cottage by the storm—I found her prostrate and insensible. For a part of the night I watched at Monsieur's bedside, calling toward morning, Pierre, the landlord. Unfaithful to his trust he fell asleep, and when Monsieur was found beneath his window this morning, attributed it to the belief that, during his delirium, the unfortunate man had risen from the bed, sought the window, and either fallen or leaped. To the villagers the explanation seemed satisfactory—not so with me. Examining the body I find evidences of finger-marks about the neck. They would tend to show Monsieur had been strangled."

Madam, whom this cold, matter-of-fact recital had deeply affected, was assisted from the room by her brother and taken to Madam Conde's apartment, where she fell on the bed, sobbing. When Monsieur returned he found the chief of the *gens d'armes* pacing the floor, as was his custom, and has been the custom of chiefs of *gens d'armes* for ages.

"You have suspicion as to who committed the crime?" questioned the walker, stopping short.

"Very strong ones."

"Do you allude to the innkeeper?

"To be brief, I refer to the boy."

"As I supposed. What are your grounds?"

"They are as yet of little value, but sufficient, I think, to detain him. One thing I have discovered is that the watcher was drugged—and could not have heard even the chateau falling. Another is that Francois remained at his father's cottage but two hours, returning, however, in the early morning. During his absence I believe he visited the inn and committed the crime. These, Monsieur, are my suspicions."

"Where is he now?"

"With the body of Monsieur."

"Have him called."

The command was obeyed. When Francois entered, pale and hollow-eyed with watching and weeping, he confronted both the chief of the *gens d'armes* and Madam's brother so suddenly that the latter, with a surprised, even terrified exclamation, retired to the more shadowy portion of the room.

"I have business with you," said the Chief abruptly. "Your name?"

"Francois Ferri."

"Your age?"

"Seventeen."

"Do you know the man found dead this morning?"

"Oui, Monsieur—very well."

"His wife?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Who is this man?"

"Her brother—I have been told."

"You attended Monsieur?"

"For many weeks."

"Did you know his ailment?"

A great many thoughts passed through Francois' mind. He glanced contemptuously in the direction of Madam's brother, then opened his lips to speak. The man in the shadows grew very white and very desperate. A faint sound of sobbing came through the corridor—a sound so very pitiful and heart-stirring.

"Answer me."

"I did not."

The man in the shadows breathed heavily.

"Was it fever?"

"It may have been.'

"Was it fever?" sternly.

"I believe it was."

"Was Monsieur ever delirious?"

"No, Monsieur, never!"

"He lies," came from the man in the shadows.

"You are sure of this?"

"I am sure."

"Francois Ferri, where were you between the hours of three and five this morning?"

So suddenly had the chief changed both his tone and his manner of questioning, that Francois was at loss for reply.

"Where were you?" repeated the man sternly.

"I will not say."

"You know who I am?"

"The chief of the *gens d'armes*, but you have no right to question me as you are doing. I will answer you when you adopt a less insulting tone; you speak as though I were a criminal!"

"You *are* a criminal!"

Astounded, stupefied, the boy started back—almost fell. His great eyes dilated, and his face became colorless.

Then, when thoughts rushed by thousands through his whirling brain, ending only, as was his hot-tempered way, in the belief that he had been insulted and wronged, he found utterance and sprang toward his accuser like an enraged wild-cat, his voice hoarse with fury.

"You who call me a criminal, you, the chief of the *gens d'armes*—whoever you are, you lie! Is this a conspiracy between you two? *I*, a criminal? You——"

The Chief, a very strong man, seized Francois and flung him on the floor, just as the latter, in his half-blind rage, was springing for the neck of the insulter.

"Lie there, you peasant dog," he said, kicking him brutally.

"Oh, not that, not that!" interposed Madam's brother, coming forward when the heavy boot was again raised.

The Chief, slipping glistening manacles on the boy's wrists, raised him rudely from the floor and pushed him toward the door. In the corridor they were met by Madam. There was a scuffle, a pause, and Francois stood beside her, his imprisoned hands stretched out before him, his beautiful eyes looking sorrowfully into hers.

"Do not fear," he said with wonderful calmness as she started back, "I would not injure you. Do you see my condition? You have done this. Your husband has been murdered—they say by me." Then he was again brutally seized and hurried from the inn. She did not see him again, but the reproachful, pathetic look in the great brown eyes, haunted her forever.

* * * * * * * *

The enormity of the crime at St. Mathilde shook Southern France to the sea-walls. That one so young and—people would say—so apparently innocent and childish looking, could have committed so terrible a deed seemed really beyond belief. People might not trust their own sons, they said in Marseilles. There had been a pretext of a trial—a trial where an evil reputation was easily manufactured for a consideration. There was no direct evidence. People remarked the prisoner's indiscretion when he attacked the chief of the *gens d'armes* after the latter had "trapped him into a confession." It was just such a trial as one may see in all civilized countries—just such a trial as a spy might get at an enemy's hands. Like all the events in Francois' short life, it had been brief—mercifully brief, perhaps, but horrible. He really could not realize at first how it all came about—how he, Francois Ferri, was a manacled galley-slave. Then he pondered—thought for many days; thought and studied, and learned to say, as all humanity eventually learns to say—" I will hope and wait."

* * * * * * * *

A man and woman standing on the deck of a large steamer as it pushed majestically through the waters of the Mediterranean, looked back at the great picture they were leaving.

" That," said he, pointing to a massive stone building, " is the prison."

She looked at it curiously. " It is a very sombre affair," she said, "one might die forgotten there."

“Many have died forgotten,” he returned, “and in that place a galley-slave is not to be envied.”

Then they watched the fading picture of Marseilles until it seemed to dissolve in the sea.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

ADVENT OF A HEROINE.

PENN ESCANES, who was intently watching, from his obscure position near the balustrade at the head of the stairs, the animated mass of people in the hotel lobby, considered it a very mixed crowd, taken as a whole—bordering on the cosmopolitan, he thought. He might single out a few he knew, but they were in the minority, and he did not particularly admire any one of them. In the very rotund individual with a suspiciously red nose he recognized Major A Peck-Suit, very conceited and somewhat wealthy, and principally conspicuous for being one of the original discoverers, and a stockholder in the famous Colorado Consolidated. The Major stamped his name on the hotel register in red, even letters, and informed the uninitiated hotel clerk that he was a "man of the mines."

The Major talked very loud, drank a great deal more than was really necessary for an individual of his age and illustrious standing, and took peculiar pride in referring to the fact that he "had earned his money and knew how to spend it." The Major was eccentric, but Penn admired him.

Down in one corner moodily sat a disappointed politician, and beside him was a wealthy ranchman with a very appalling reputation. A woman passed through the crowd, who had poisoned her husband, but been declared not guilty by a tender-hearted jury. There was a bank clerk who was spending his winter's salary and making a wholesale idiot of himself; there were two or three adventurers, and a silly old bank president who had dropped from the clouds and was an admirer of a twice-divorced, but attractive matron from "the coast." These Escanes knew—and did not admire.

"You truly have the patience of a saint- I have kept you waiting almost half an hour; but that's the fault of the dust you know—it actually poured down my back. Give me a Manitou carriage-ride for dust every time."

"To tell the truth, I had about forgotten your existence, Jack. It was a vice, rather than a virtue, that kept me here—I was mentally picking some of these people to pieces."

"You are not unknown here, then?"

"Not wholly—there is the Major, you know; but I do not particularly care to cultivate my other quondam acquaintances. They may be all right, as the world goes, but you see I know something of their histories and, unfortunately, familiarity still breeds contempt."

"There are whole volumes of history walking around down there, I suppose," volunteered Aumerle.

"Thick, badly-printed volumes, bound with a deceptive cover and entitled 'I am not what I am'."

"Nonsense."

"Shakespeare."

"We are not all villains."

" The majority of us are entitled to an election certificate on that issue."

" To be brief and slummy, we are all liars and thieves ? "

" I will say we are, just, as they tell us in the mining camp, for the sake of argument—although I detest argument."

" You cannot argue with me—it would be disgusting, irritating, unsatisfactory, and we should miss a good dinner."

They walked downstairs, pushed their way through the mass in the lobby and entered the dining-room. There was a rumbling, jarring crash of dishes, a tingling of silver, and a sound of trivial conversation carried on in a key just high enough to mingle unmelodiously with the other noises. Every one was talking at once and eating a great deal in a very short time. The place bore the appearance of a ten-minute railway eating-station rather than the dining room of a great summer resort. But it was decidedly American, and unmistakably western.

" Have you noticed who this evening's arrivals were ? " asked Aumerle indifferently.

"There were but five."

"And they?"

"I remember but two—they are now being seated at the table opposite ours. One a young lady, Miss Marston, I believe; and the other, I should judge, her companion—an elderly lady with a silly twitter and a masculine method of writing her name. Mrs. Sowders, I think the hotel clerk informed me. I am already interested in them."

Aumerle glanced in the direction indicated. To Escanes' astonishment both ladies slightly bowed in recognition of his companion.

"You are acquainted?"

"But slightly. Miss Marston and I met in Chicago some weeks ago, through an introduction from Harry Ballard. I did not suppose she would even remember me."

"She is an attractive young woman," decided Escanes.

"So I think," returned his friend, carelessly. "Are you looking for a heroine?"

"I am always looking for heroines. Miss Marston would make an admirable one—just as she is. 'Fancy,' say I to the absorbed reader, 'a trimly-built girl, just budding into womanhood; a wealth of brown hair, streaked with an enchanting shade of bronze, falling from her clear, resolute and charming face; large, melting eyes, bewitching mouth—'"

"For heaven's sake, Penn, don't give your next one melting eyes and a bewitching mouth—they all do that, and you have kept it up ever since you commenced to scribble your abominable and uninteresting love stories. Besides, Miss Marston doesn't look at all as you describe her—unless in respect to the bronze-brown hair," he added apologetically.

"Well, I will let her melting eyes pass—or melt. But she has lovely eyes just the same, hasn't she?"

"So you say."

"Brown, too. Pshaw, I can arouse no interest in you whatever concerning fair femininity. Has Miss Marston parents living?"

"I do not know."

"Brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles?"

"My dear boy, I know absolutely nothing

concerning the lady, further than that she is, or at least was, introduced to me as Miss Marston. I see her to-day for the second time during my existence."

Aumerle was busy with the chops just then, and made no further remarks concerning the lady during the meal.

Mrs. Sowders was usually on the look-out for acquaintances during her travels. She missed no opportunity, yet was properly discriminative. She could repel or attract—just as she wished. A forced introduction to some person with whom she was not favorably impressed, went no further. The individual who found favor in her eyes would not thirst for recognition. Mrs. Sowders judged on the instant, was not always wrong in her impressions, and was even enthusiastic over those she did admire. When she entered the dining-room that evening, her quick, bright eyes noted nearly every occupant in a surprisingly short time. She recognized Aumerle and so informed her companion.

" There is the young man we met in Chicago —Aumerle, I believe. He lives out here somewhere. I think we had better bow if he looks this way."

Miss Marston, who usually found it profitable to follow Mrs. Sowders' suggestions in matters of this kind, considerately but coldly acknowledged the young man's presence.

"We met just twenty-three young men in Chicago—I suppose this is one of them," said the young lady in a slightly remonstrative tone.

"The eighteenth, my dear," her companion said promptly. "Young Ballard introduced us one night at the theatre."

Miss Marston decided she hadn't the slightest remembrance of the occasion, but wondered if Aumerle intended staying at Manitou any length of time, for if he had any sort of life he would certainly keep things from being terribly stupid.

CHAPTER II.

INSIDE HISTORY.

THE following day Escanes met, and secured an introduction to the new-comer. Like the majority of his little Manitou episodes the affair occurred on the stairs.

“Ah, those stairs,” said he, “show me a summer resort without stairs, and I'll show you a perfect poke of a place.” Miss Marston and her matronly chaperone were going up; Escanes and Aumerle going down. Miss Marston nodded pleasantly at the latter, stopped and made the customary remark about Colorado atmosphere. Escanes did not hear the remark—at any rate Aumerle agreed with it.

Seizing the opportunity the young man presented his friend. Then followed a brief chat. during which it was developed the two ladies were “doing” the Centennial State with Manitou and the mountains as the chief attractions, a lifting of hats, "Good afternoon," in four voices, and a separation. The two gentlemen walked out on the lower terrace, one to smoke, one to observe.

"Ah, then this is the novelist of whom I have so often heard," Miss Marston had remarked.

"It is the writer of stories who has an unenviable reputation," was Escane's modest reply.

William Penbrook Escanes, as the literary world knew him, and "Penn" Escanes, as he had been somewhat familiarly called during his reportorial and Bohemian days, was a financial literary success. Young, possibly not twenty-three, he was boyish, even effeminate in manner, not at all the man to count his friends by hundreds, however numerous his admirers might be. There was something both repelling and attractive about him—one could never strictly account for either of the seeming second-natures. He was very thin, brown, and scarcely prepossessing from a physical point of view, but he had a refined, even handsome, face, while his whole art of expressive commendation or condemnation shone from his eyes. And they were wonderful eyes—orbs which he indeed scarcely knew the power of, although they so frequently seemed to speak his very thoughts before he could form words to verbally express them. Escanes was very severe on a large class of people he had once known and with whom he had even been intimate, but rudely given them the popular American " go-by " when once his sun was in the ascendant. He had been a markedly peculiar individual during the whole of his natural existence. He was unfortunate, or at least considered himself so, in being introduced to the world at a too early stage of his career.

Born in a disagreeable western state he had been taken, when a child, still further toward the wonderful empire of the setting sun, to the roughest of western mining camps in existence. It was generally understood by immediate and little concerned relatives that he should either thrive amid these occidental surroundings or die. At first the person concerned expressed no regard which road fate should choose, but finally resolved not to let his demise go on record until he had made a struggle of some sort. At an extremely susceptible age he was placed as errand boy in a store, a position from which he graduated through various experiences in grocery marts, clothing emporiums, coal offices, and railway depots. Although not wholly placid, his youthful career was almost distressingly uneventful to every one but himself. Although thrown constantly into the society of men and women, he held an aversion, even shrank from intimate association with his fellow creatures. There were, of course, the usual friends, but even at this early period Escanes was so decidedly, silently analytical that they numbered but few and were extremely puzzled at his dreamy eccentricities. There was one marked characteristic—and uncontrollable passion for the drama. His peculiar views on histrionians and dramatic productions in general, which he reserved to discuss mentally during the tedious daily grind, one day found their way abstractedly to paper and then, somehow, found their way to a newspaper office—typical, if not ideal, western journalistic headquarters, where every one worked in their shirt-sleeves and scolded everyone else for imaginary wrongs.

"This is somewhat crudely written," remarked the managing-editor to his assistant, stopping the busy pens for a time, "but the ideas are original and worth preserving. You might look it over and send it in as editorial matter. Who is the author, I wonder?"

"The initials on the last page are 'W. P. E.'"

"It was evidently written by a woman," the editor observed, "and will hardly find appreciation with the majority of our readers. We will use it, however."

When Escanes saw the initial production of his pencil boldly-leaded in the editorial columns of the great hyphenated daily, he was extremely flattered, but not surprised. He had always believed his pet theories would some day, and in some manner, find their way to publicity, although he had never made frantic attempts to parade them. At his leisure he contributed an article corresponding to his, first and was rewarded by seeing it, also, " posted conspicuously."

Finally there came a short, business-like letter, as puzzlingly chirographical as such missive usually are, from the managing editor. It was pointedly brief, written on glazed paper, and began: " My dear Madam." My dear Madam was requested to furnish a weekly *feuilleton*, for which would be furnished a " slight compensation." In reply " Madam " gave gratuitously the important information relative to her sex, consented to furnish the desired articles, but declined the inconsiderate compensation. For months thereafter, the *feuilleton of Phillipe* was a feature with the *Record-Review* that met with even a remarkable success, for the great mining camp was not without its literary critics. The weekly letters even caused discussion among this class, and finally the newspapers began clipping some of the brighter little observations of this very original Phillipe—yet all the time the writer plodded along at an employment not only distasteful but even revolting to him. He walked past the office of the *Review* twenty times a day, passed the great editor of that extremely well conducted daily whenever he went to meals, and not infrequently heard animated discussions in restaurants on the very articles his pen had produced—yet no one had even the remotest idea that this white-faced boy was in any way responsible for the little humorous indiscretions of the wonderful Phillipe. In time a communication reached the post-office box of W. P. E., containing the information that the *Record-Review* was in urgent need of a reporter—not a journalist, an editor or a general manager, but merely a reporter. The editor was free to confess that he admired W. P. E's work, and thought, if the latter so desired, he might take advantage of the opportunity.

W. P. E. made himself known.

"You are only a boy!" exclaimed the editor bewilderedly.

"Not my fault," grimly remarked the youth.

"I have only been on earth sixteen years. I suppose I am a prodigy—but I can't help it."

"And you did this work? Impossible!"

"I shall convince you," said Escanes as he seated himself and "ground out" an essay on a given subject.

Reportorial duty was full of ups and downs. Escanes did good work for his paper, but did it under difficulties no other scribbler on the staff experienced. He was too young. People couldn't bring themselves to actually believe he performed the work with which he was credited—and frequently, therefore, others received the credit for what he really did do. It was very depressing, very discouraging.

There were those who even took the fatiguing trouble to inform the young man that he had no business where he was—that he should have been in school. Very few spoke seriously to him, and he gradually grew disgusted with the human race in general. A crowning abhorrence for his fellow-reporters came upon him when he one day chanced to hear one of them unblushingly take the full credit for an exceptionally well written article of his own production. Penn was not a Sidney Carton, although he preferred a back seat to an open disturbance in meeting by demanding his right to a front one. At 19, chafing under these outrages, he decided he would do something for which no one would dare to take credit, criticise him however much they would. Since his main crime had consisted in his being too young and hardly brazen enough to push himself, he determined on a stroke that would at least place him on a fairer footing in the world. Then followed a doubly-busy life. Finally, after the customary tedious delays and disheartening disappointments, there appeared a modest little book which attracted some attention from the press, and a great amount of comment among those who knew the author. There was little consolation in it from a financial point of view, but it was a stepping-stone, and the second, which followed quickly, firmly established the young man in the great, disappointing literary world. In the mountain city he might have been the lion of the hour—an honor which he scornfully refused, and, with an intensely human, but wholly irreligious, delight, passed his former defamers coolly by with a most coldly sarcastic and superior visage. He was even discourteous, now that fickle success had consented to be wooed. Did Mrs. Rocks-Chloride request his presence at a "literary dinner, the chances were exceedingly favorable for Mrs. Chloride never receiving so much as an acknowledgment of her daintily-penned note.

"Look here," he exploded one day, in Aumerle's presence, flinging an invitation before him with a disgusted gesture, "what a wholesouled lot of hypocrites they all are. Mrs. Malburn writes that without my presence her 'afternoon' will be as cheerless as a day in February. Do you know, old fellow," he confided, leaning seriously forward, "that such letters only serve to feed my fire of resentment against these people? Two years ago that note would have been a sesame to fairyland to a poor, outcast, struggling boy. It would have been almost too glorious to seem true. To-day that boy is dead—numbered among my extinct selves. There is only a cynical, unchristian man in his place."

When it became unbearable to daily see his former associates—with whom he seemed to take peculiar pride in making himself wholly intolerable--Escanes bade farewell to the few friends who had remained through darkness and light, whose hearts could never change, despite the eccentricities of years, and went out, as he had always longed to go, into the great wide world to which he had earned the key. His later successes had enabled him to provide a home for an aged mother, partially assist in supplying the demands for charity in his own novel and somewhat astonishing way, and to travel where fancy took him, be it to the poles or the equator. Despite his cynicism he believed firmly in several things—among others, Jack Aumerle.

A striking contrast was Aumerle to Escanes. In only one particular did they seem to directly agree—both were pronounced rovers. It had been a matter for comment that the two got along so well, when their distinct tastes were taken into consideration, but somehow they did. It was a sort of mutual understanding that whenever Escanes became gloomy, as is the exclusive privilege of a literary genius, his companion should leave him severely to himself. Consequently there were surprisingly few irritable collisions. John Aumerle was the son of Rutherford Aumerle, of Colorado. Old Aumerle was a weak, kindly individual who had worked in the mines, and didn't much care who became acquainted with the fact. He was charitable, too decidedly lenient with the world, and suffered by the usual impositions, as a consequence.

During the days when old Aumerle was down in the black, wet depths of the Great Hindoo mining claim, John was struggling with the long, neatly-written, but generally depressing columns of figures in the account books of the Silver Brick bank. He was somewhat older than Escanes, and a firm admirer of the journalist. Their good fortunes seemed to come simultaneously. Aumerle, *pere*, began shipping from his lease, and "The Way of the World" went into an edition of forty thousand on the same day. Young Aumerle was a bright, handsome fellow, and a leading feature in such a class of higher society as the mining camp held. He was as undiscriminatingly generous as his father, and when the Aumerle fortune began to assume proportions, both *pere* and *fils* became alarmed. "They didn't want too much money," old Aumerle explained, as he handed a check for an enormous amount to the secretary of a Home for Unfortunates. Young Aumerle, with the Great Hindoo at his back, became a target for designing women with daughters, but, however generous he was with his money, he kept heart-free and managed to cleverly foil every little thrust at matrimony. An affair of the heart was something he had never seriously contemplated. Escanes seldom referred to such a delicate subject, and there was not sufficient interest in it for Aumerle to regard it seriously.

They were at the great western watering place, these two—some called them eccentric—young men, it being, singularly enough, merely a stopping point on a tour through the west, as with Miss Marston and her elderly companion.

"Mr. Aumerle is a gentlemanly young fellow," observed Mrs. Sowders. "I think it extremely fortunate, Dorris, my dear, that we have met him. Mr. Escanes is more reserved, possibly, but at times so deliciously funny."

"They are undoubtedly proper young men," acquiesced Miss Marston. "We could certainly do no better than treat them with courtesy."

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSES BRONSON.

One need not be nearly so proper at Manitou as—even at Saratoga, one might say. Young ladies have been frequently known to coldly leave their *chaperones* and visit the caves in company with a newly-found acquaintance. Such a thing is never commented upon, for all young men at Manitou are eminently respectable—at least while at Manitou.

"*Chaperones* are *so* stupid," said the English young lady who, strangely enough, set the custom. One must always confine one's self to such a silly line of conversation when they are around, and it becomes decidedly a bore."

Mrs. Sowders, being a very sensible *chaperone*, saw no direct harm in the little daily excursions of her charge and the handsome Mr. Aumerle. The latter was, as she had said, a very proper personage, while Dorris was too level-headed to go too far on her own responsibility. So Mrs. Sowders submitted graciously to the Manitou custom regarding *chaperones*, and the two young people enjoyed the mountain sights as young people, outside the trammels of strict society, usually do. There were so many places of interest, too, that their time was fully occupied and they seemed to have been old-time friends after the first recognition in the dining-room.

On an upper veranda, almost buried in a luxurious cushioned rocker, Aumerle was idly smoking. On the balustrade was Escanes, dreamily looking at the hazy, blue hills, lying against their crimson-slashed back ground. It was oppressively hot and delightfully quiet. The newspapers and the latest novels occupied the time of the hundreds of loungers on the piazzas.

A carriage stopped.

" The ladies have returned," announced Escanes from his superior position.

Aumerle dusted the ashes from his coat, gave an introductory cough, and remarked: " Do you know, Penn, I think Miss Marston a very clever young woman?"

"I have reason to believe your thoughts run in that direction. At least you have kept me so informed"

"I mean it too."

Escanes laughed.

"A charming young woman—and surely one to fall in love with."

"Well, not exactly love. Don't call it that. I admire Miss Marston."

"As a sister, but—"

"Don't begin that now. I never thought seriously of love in all my life, and have no reason to begin now. It doesn't follow one should be in love simply because one admires a young woman."

"Let me see," said Escanes, leaning against a post and lighting a cigarette, after the fashion of a stage-hero in a summer resort drama, "we have been here, you and I, about two weeks, Miss Marston and the amiable widow—I find her amiable, though somewhat affected—scarcely seven days. Miss Marston has visited the places of interest—where so remote as to make a foot-journey fatiguing—in a dog-cart. You were the driver on every occasion, and that peculiar vehicle accommodated but two. The interesting *chaperone* has been left greatly to her own devices for amusement—or mine, and I'm a flattering success as a bore when I attempt to entertain Every evening, since the arrival of these two interesting ladies, you have voluntarily informed me that you consider Miss Marston a 'very charming young woman.' You are right. She is all of that, and an uncommonly sensible one too, but my exceeding familiarity with the expression you are constantly using is wearing upon me.

"By the way," he said, suddenly, "do you call her Dorris yet?"

'No—of course not. A—although I did once—by mistake, of course. I corrected myself at once."

"Heavens! it is worse than I thought."

Aumerle simply laughed.

"You are seriously in love," charged Escanes.

"I am not," he returned.

"I might demonstrate you were."

"Do so."

"Who is Miss Dorris Marston?"

"Wh—why—well, she's Miss Marston, of Providence, of course. She's no one else," stammered the man in the chair.

"That's convincing, isn't it? What do you know of her?"

"Well—n—nothing, to tell the truth," was the somewhat uneasy confession. "I never turn back pages when there's no possible reason."

"In a matter of this kind, it is essentially important that back pages should be turned. I have been reading them over, thanks to the amiable *chaperone*, who kindly did the turning. *Apropos* to this, I am becoming quite interested in the *chaperone.* She calls me 'her boy' now, so you see I am no longer unprotected. Well, Miss Marston has neither father, mother, uncle or aunt. They were all rich, and considerately died early. She has extremely distant relatives in New York, Mrs. Sowders says, and a brother somewhere in existence. A sister died. The widow—she is actually a widow—was appointed guardian of Miss Marston's wealth, which position she held until that interesting young individual became of age. For four years the two have been abroad. They are now touring the west and Mrs. Sowders 'weally knows where Salt Lake is situated' so familiar with its topography has she become—for which tuition I claim the exclusive honor."

"I am glad your geographical instructions have turned so flatteringly to your credit," said Aumerle, suddenly breaking off the conversation and walking away.

At the dinner table, Miss Marston took occasion to present Mr. J. Andrew Herrick. Mr. Herrick was a relative of Major A. Peck-Suit, and evidently considered his uncle an admirable model, for he divided his name similarly and dressed continually in brown-checks. The Major was fifty-six, and his nephew twenty-one. J. Andrew, who came to Manitou that day, had been presented to Mrs. Sowders and her charge, by the Major himself, and at once camped on Miss Marston's trail. He confided to the quartet at the dinner table that he was just returning from his initial visit east, and remarked, with an apparent satisfaction, that he cared blamed little for Boston, New York, or any other place bearing a semblance to metropolitanism. "There is so much hurry and heartlessness," he said, "no one looks out for any one but himself." There was a certain satisfaction, Mr. Herrick observed, in having first seen the light of day in a rough log-cabin somewhere in a California gulch—a defile into which the sun, according to this young gentleman, shone brighter and with more genuine splendor than anywhere else. He hinted to his amused and interested listeners that he was actually impatient to get up into the mountains and down into the mines again.

Mr. J. Andrew Herrick was brown, not at all unprepossessing, western in all but name, and had such an engaging manner and honest face despite his rugged mountain character, that he became a general favorite with the little party at the table before the meal was half concluded. What though he drank his coffee with a noise similar to that produced by a water-spout, and managed his fork as though it were a sort of light-weight miner's pick? He believed in God but thought possibly the governor of Colorado might hold the more enviable position of the two—never speculated much either way. He was remarkably original, naturally refreshing, and afforded his new acquaintances a thoroughly enjoyable half-hour in the dining-room.

Aumerle expressed some surprise that Major Suit was an acquaintance of Miss Marston. Since their arrival at Manitou he had never even seen the Major converse with her.

"Our acquaintance only extends back to our meeting in Denver," explained Mrs. Sowders. "Dorris is interested with him in the—my dear, what is it? I've completely forgotten; that mine with the peculiar name that your uncle lost half his money in, and never got so much as a piece of stone from?"

"One of your western mines in all truth," laughed Dorris, "the 'Great Horn Spoon.'"

"That's located down in Potter's Gulch in Saguache county," interrupted young Herrick.

"I know it perfectly—you must too, Escanes."

"Yes; I am thoroughly familiar with it," returned the novelist dryly. "It was a former custom to feed my wages from that spoon."

"Yes, and my income," remarked Aumerle. "Penn and I were both 'taken in' on it. How strange we should all be interested in that great outrage."

"Dorris and I intend going over before we leave Colorado," said Mrs. Sowders, vaguely wondering where it really was, and what it looked like. "We have nothing else to do, and want to get into the heart of the mountains and rest."

"We will all go," decided Aumerle, "and take the Major along to look at this great fraud he has been perpetrating."

"You cry fraud too easily," said Herrick. "The best mines in the world have been worked for years before a pennyworth was extracted. In the Carbonate camp the underground explorers are greatly aided and guided in their search by maps defining chutes, veins, etc., as they were found in other properties.

The Great Horn Spoon is developing unknown and unexplored territory—virgin ground, as they call it in the mining regions. It may become a great producer and may never become anything—the chances are as good one way as the other."

"I suppose you are right," said Miss Marston, "although I don't know exactly what you mean by your mining terms—you will have to give us object lessons, I'm afraid. Since none of us really need the money consequent upon big shipments from the mine, I believe we would do well to wait until there are better reasons for complaint. As for myself, if the Horn Spoon ever does dish up wealth in any quantity, I shall have it all fed to the inmates of an institution for homeless children—or something of that sort."

"And I to the inmates of a house for unfortunate authors," remarked Escanes gravely.

"You are both inclined charitably," laughed Herrick. "I don't know what I really would do with my income."

Returning to his room early that evening through the darkened hall, Herrick ran directly into a diminutive young lady dressed in gray and evidently in deep distress.

" I—it's just too mean," she sobbed gently into a white pocket handkerchief.

" I beg your pardon," remarked the young man.

" I'm sure it's granted," she said looking up, " Why, for goodness' sake, it's Wallie ! "

" Hello, Jo—how'd you come here; where's Gladys ? "

The gray young lady had thrown her handkerchief aside and was clinging desperately to Herrick, as though he were a sort of rocky refuge in a storm.

" Oh, Wallie, I'm so glad it's you ! We have had a horrid, horrid time, and mamma has gone and Gladys is sick, and if it wasn't for me I just don't know what she would do, and I'm not well, and the man was just perfectly disgusting." All of which was decidedly clear to the surprised young man.

" I—I don't know just what you mean, Jo dear," he said, somewhat awkwardly picking up the handkerchief, and attempting to stop the torrent of tears.

" We—well, you can't expect me to explain it all at once, can you ? And you haven't even kissed me, though you've been away a year—oh, everything's just perfectly horrid ! "

" Evidently," remarked the refuge, making reparation. " Only, how can you expect me to kiss you the very first thing ?—you didn't think it proper when I left."

The gray young lady immediately resorted to tears.

" There you are, wanting to quarrel again—and—and—mamma gone and Gladys ill and that horrid man—"

" Jo, you are an inexplicable mystery. If you will kindly walk over to the parlor I'll sit and talk with you sensibly, but this is certainly no place for a spectacular scene. And, remember, please, that you can't tell everything in one breath. There is evidently a man in this case, and I want to know about him."

" He was dreadful ! " proclaimed the gray young lady.

"Probably—all men are."

"Perfectly horrid."

"Well, well—he can wait awhile at any rate." he responded soothingly as he led her way.

"N—not under the gas jet," she remonstrated, when he entered the parlor; "don't let us sit there—every one can see I've been crying."

Herrick led her to a seat by the window, where the faint ripple of a running, hurrying little creek was just audible, and jumped on the window after she had seated herself.

"Now," he said, quite seriously, "begin at the beginning, and hurry right through."

"Well, it was perfectly awful. We left Leadville this morning, mamma, Gladys and I, intending to come to Manitou for a two weeks stay. Before the train left a boy came to mamma with a dirty little yellow telegram that nearly upset her by the very sight. Papa was dreadfully ill, and she must go right on to Denver, it read. Gladys and I begged to go too, but she said it couldn't be anything serious, and so bade us remain here at Manitou until we should hear from her. It was quite dark when we got off at the depot, and a man with a great black coat came up and said; 'Hotel, Miss?' so gruffly and ungentlemanly that I supposed he really must be an agent, or whatever you call them, for one of these places. I said 'yes,' absently enough, for my mind was on papa all the time. We gave him our satchels, and he walked quite a distance with us. Finally, he said, 'that's the house you want,' pointed to our hotel and coolly walked off up the road. I called after him to bring us our hand-bags, but he laughed and started to run. Then I ran after him and he—he pushed me down in the road. Oh, it was terrible, and Gladys screamed, and we're here without a cent, without a change of clothing, even, and—and papa sick in Denver," finished Jo; breaking freshly into tears and vehemently iterating that "everything was horrid."

Herrick leaned back, nearly lost his balance, and laughed loud enough to disturb more than one pair of lovers below, putting them in a flutter lest they had been discovered.

"Why, I thought it must have been something terrible! That man was only a thief!"

"B—but it was the first live thief I ever had any experience with—and we were alone, Gladys and I," sobbed the gray young lady. "You're horridly mean to laugh at me—I think it was brave. Gladys wouldn't have run after him."

"You *were* brave," said Jack, consolingly "And now let us go to Gladys."

In the hall they met another gray young lady, who, presumably, was none other than Gladys herself, looking for her sister. The dramatic display which Herrick had designated "spectacular" was again repeated, although with more reserve, for Gladys was older than Jo, and disliked a scene in public. The meeting an old friend at such a critical time, however, was an important event, even with her.

"Has she told you what a goose she has made of herself?" asked Gladys.

"I am thoroughly familiar with the circumstances of your arrival," responded Herrick, "and really I can't say that I am honestly sorry. Jo has gained more experience, at any rate."

"But do you think we'll get our satchels back?" asked the first young lady, now somewhat composed.

"It is extremely improbable—but you may. I will warn the officials. What did the man look like?"

"He had a black beard and a linen coat," responded Jo, promptly.

"That's very definite, certainly—I can point you out fifty men of the same description."

"I really don't know what he wore or how he looked," faltered Gladys, "I wasn't thinking of him at all, and it was very dark. I guess there is little need of a search."

"I'll know him if I see him again," decided Jo, "and if I ever *do* come across him—"

"He shall be hanged," finished Herrick, promptly.

CHAPTER IV.

CLOUDLAND.

THE customary quartette at the table near the door, were considerably surprised the following morning by the gorgeous entrance of Herrick, bearing, on either arm, a young lady in gray.

He smiled broadly as he reached the table. "The Misses Bronson," he announced collectively and then, noting his mistake, "Miss Gladys and Miss Josephine."

There was the usual intensely agonizing pronunciation and repetition of names, after which the little party settled down to discuss the breakfast. The Misses Bronson were cordially welcomed, were mentally pronounced "proper" by Mrs. Sowders, and became sort of instantaneous favorites. They were bright, entertaining, delightfully ignorant when one attempted to talk seriously—more especially the tender-hearted Jo—and were, above all, attractive, if not handsome. The peculiarly noticeable thing about the Misses Bronson was their resemblance to one another in a remarkable degree, despite a difference of two years in age.

The conversation ran in the usual summer resort order—the weather, the people and the dullness as compared with "other places."

"Before we go to Saguache," said Dorris, finally breaking from the time-worn topics, "we should certainly ascend Pike's Peak—I believe it is quite the thing, now that the carriage road has been nearly completed, and, with the Misses Bronson present, we might make up a delightful party."

"How nice!" ejaculated the Misses Bronson in a breath.

"A good plan," decided Herrick at once.

"We certainly couldn't leave Manitou without a view from the peak," said Mrs. Sowders from one end of the table, "and this is undoubtedly a good opportunity, now that we are all together."

Of course Escanes and Aumerle acquiesced to whatever was suggested by Miss Marston, and therefore the trip was decided upon for the day following—a ride to Cascade, from where the ascent must begin, to take place that evening, and an early morning start on horseback. So a great amount of hurrying and worrying, and not a little scolding, began directly after breakfast, and Herrick, who was appointed supply-man, and was expected to telegraph for rooms at the hotel, arrange for the horses, purchase the railway tickets, and supply the Misses Bronson with riding-habits—all at one time and in an exceptionally pleasant manner—began to wish, before the noon hour passed, that Miss Marston's bright idea had remained in her haughty little head.

* * * * *

In the gold and gray of a quiescent morning, just as the first freshing breeze made itself delightfully apparent to the susceptible cheek, the start was made. Nothing but the metallic clang, clang of the horses' hoofs on the hard, paved roadway disturbed the holy morning stillness, and even these seemed, finally, when some little distance was covered, to merge themselves into the low, musical rushing of the glistening, foam-flecked waters of the creek. Straight, silent sentinels stood the pine trees, without so much as a needle stirring or a cone dropping to disturb the bird and insect life so soon to revive by natural instinct.

After the hurry of mounting and starting, the travellers had settled in their saddles without a word, and the journey through the trees was silent and unbroken. The spell of the early morning was not to be lost by even the lightest of laughs from the vivacious Jo, nor by the slightest attempt at a joke from the jolly Herrick.

Dorris and Aumerle, who had ridden far ahead from the very outset, paused on reaching a slight eminence at the end of a green Arcadian park, to wait for the coming of their companions. The world was just waking. A long gray cloud shot out among the greenish reflections to the north, and slowly extended until it belted the sky as far as their vision extended. The huge form of the mountain cut out the splendor of the sunrise, but they could see the shadows merge from black to gray and from gray to blue, until the slanting beams caught the dainty green tips of the splendid trees and tinged them with pale, yellow-whitish gold. From crimson and gray the northern sky faded quickly into yellow and then dissolved itself into an ever-extending blue. Little striped squirrels ran nimbly along the rotting logs by the roadside, birds ventured from the evergreens for the first time and transferred their twitterings from the boughs to bushes; the stately trees condescended to move with the oncoming breezes; and the sound of a bell, floating far into the hills from the valley, seemed to announce, beyond the possibility of silent dispute from a few cool shadows, that the day was beginning.

"I never thought it half so beautiful," said Dorris, softly, "it seems like the blooming of a great, gorgeous flower."

Then, hearing the neighs of their companions' horses, the two turned and were shortly galloping up the smooth, gently-sloping road.

"It's just perfectly delightful;" remarked Miss Josephine, who managed to find her voice when it became an assured fact that the sun had risen, "and I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Who would suppose there was really anything remarkable in a sunrise—outside of pictures and books?"

"Pictures and books don't tell half the story," commented Escanes, who was addressed.

"It is certainly something worth rising so early for," said Gladys to Herrick, who, of course, agreed with her.

Only Mrs. Sowders, plodding anxiously along behind, had failed to be impressed by its beauty. She was heartily wishing she had not entered on this troublesome and unprofitable expedition, and was struggling with thoughts of giving it up and returning, or "roughing it out" with true western grit.

Shortly began the slow, cautious climb by the narrow, winding road, and then there were few chances for scenic admiration, excepting when the horses were stopped and a "breathing spell," so necessary in mountain climbing, taken. It was a shifting, panoramic picture of valleys, glens, parks, hill, and barren mountain-sides. A novelty at every step went unnoticed by all save Dorris. Even Escanes devoted more attention to the safe-footing of his horse, for the road was new, and as yet decidedly rough in places. Suddenly the members of the party found themselves shut in between towering, straight walls of granite, and, looking up, saw the immense, commanding peak, thrusting itself into the blue vault. There was a moment of admiration and then the horses were commanded to their utmost to reach the coveted destination in the clouds.

" It seems like a journey to Heaven," said Gladys once, loud enough for the entire party to hear, and her expression caught favor at once.

" It seems as though I am already in Heaven—it would be sacrilege to go much higher," observed Aumerle lowly, looking toward his companion.

" I do not understand."

" The understanding lies with yourself—it is

Heaven to be with you, as nearly as I can realize it."

She colored and laughed.

" You are growing sentimental," she said brightly, " and your remarks have no relevance to the situation. We are pilgrims, treading the ' steep and thorny path ' to the summit—Heaven, as Miss Gladys would no doubt term it, and not inaptly either. Our journey to-day bears a marked semblance to our daily journeys through life——"

" You are growing religious—and serious," he intimated, " and in view of that it is my privilege to grow sentimental, more especially as I can show cause."

" One can always show cause for growing either religious or serious too," she returned with warmth, " but, in view of the fact that neither sentimentality, religion or seriousness are absolutely indispensable on this occasion, hadn't we better drop all three."

He assented, laughingly, and the conversation took a more trivial turn, or was stopped altogether, according to the mood.

Later, as the animals plodded patiently around the twisted road, the faces of the riders began to show an anxious expression as their eyes sought the west. A white, fluffy cloud was assuming a darkening aspect and spreading itself out like an immense, threatening bird of prey.

" Our day will be spoiled—it's too horridly horrid," moaned Jo, who had fallen back with Mrs. Sowders and left both Escanes and Herrick to enjoy Gladys' company.

" We may reach Grand View before the storm overtakes us," called out Dorris; " and I have been told the view from there is even better than on the apex itself."

With this in mind, the riders urged their horses even faster.

" I should be extremely sorry to have our pleasure ruined, as Miss Bronson predicts," said Aumerle to his companion.

" It really does seem unjust, when we had such bright prospects at dawn," Dorris returned. " As usual, I suppose we must make the best of it."

A late-morning breeze had blown her bronze-brown hair from its coil beneath the jaunty cap, and it fell curlingly around her face and on her brown riding-habit. Sparkling with excitement and the impression the panoramic mountain scenes had inspired, her full brown eyes rested upon Aumerle with a sight and feeling that seemed born of a higher world, There was yet apparent, among the rude, granite-rock surroundings, the womanly tenderness and grace, just tinged with haughtiness, that Aumerle had noted the first day he met her at Manitou. The charm in her whole manner, which he had been attempting to resist from the first, was now made doubly dangerous by the new light in the soul-burning eyes, and the young man, he who had sworn no woman should fascinate, did a very indiscreet thing then and there. Their companions were far behind—he was alone with this dainty, beautiful creature in brown. He did not attempt an argument with himself, but rushed wildly, almost blindly, on. With insanely-passionate haste he presented his claims for her affection, finally drawing up his horse to finish his suit.

"I love you, this is what I have been trying to tell—will you be my wife?"

She had hardly seemed to comprehend the meaning of his ill-chosen words until he had about concluded. Then she reined in her horse and sat quite still, with a puzzled, sorrowful downward glance at the barren hills below. The fleecy harbingers of the slowly moving black cloud in the west could not have been whiter than her agonized face.

"This ise xtremely unfortunate," she managed to say after a time, "you spoke so suddenly and have quite worried me. I am sure you did not mean what you said, Mr. Aumerle. We are comparative strangers, you know, and such a turn in the conversation as you made just then was exceedingly—well, was scarcely opportune."

Her voice was firm now, and the color had again entered her cheeks.

"I will attribute your remarks to temporary insanity," she said brightly, looking over at him, "or to anything you may wish—only, *please*, Mr. Aumerle, don't let such a thing occur again. I feel like scolding you terribly. And I declare, I noticed a drop of rain—I am afraid Miss Josephine will have sufficient cause to mourn."

She gave the gentle pony a smart lash and was soon some distance in advance of Aumerle. He did not move for a time, but finally gave a short, pathetic little laugh, like one who had been unwillingly wakened from a refreshing sleep, and spurred his horse into a brisk trot.

"I have blundered—and in heaven," he muttered, with just a tinge of humor.

* * * * *

Innumerable and successive "horrids" from Jo, and a murmur of disappointment from the remainder of the party, was the result of the stop at Grand View. A drizzling, disagreeable, cold rain was falling, and there was absolutely nothing to see.

"We are in a cloud," said Escanes, gloomily, "and may as well continue to the main peak. There is a possibility of it lifting."

At the signal station the most welcome feature was a bright fire, and a not very extensive, but satisfactory luncheon. An hour's waiting was not without its reward. Suddenly the white vapor descended—not far, but just enough to disclose the jutting, rugged tops of many mountains. Slowly the clouds receded, and below the little band on the rocks was a great, rolling, billowy ocean of white, beyond which, when the upper strata lifted, were the dim outlines of the distant peaks. There were no pictures of the pastoral life in the lowlands, not even a glimpse at the twisting rivers—nothing but cold, grand projections of barren rocks lifted above the now pinkly-tinted opalescent sea. Gradually the great nacreous vapor crept toward them again, the mystic-picture, vision-like in its brevity and wondrous beauty, dissolved into the clouds, and the cold rain awoke them to their position.

The return was tedious, the road muddy, and the little band wholly depressed in spirits. A grumble from Jo, at various stages of the descent, and an attempted gentle remonstrance from her sister, was the only form of conversation indulged in, to which the remainder of the party listened with a satisfaction peculiarly grim. Dorris and Aumerle, who led the party as they had during the morning, exchanged not a word. Escanes and Herrick rode silently beside the Misses Bronson, while Mrs. Sowders mentally thanked Providence that she was each minute being brought nearer an end of her day's indiscretion.

The entrance upon the wide, level stretch of road leading down to Cascade, caused a noticeable change for the better in the dispirited band, and the younger Miss Bronson actually dashed up to the hotel with a joyous little laugh.

Aumerle assisted Dorris to dismount.

" Will you pardon me ? " he whispered, " I fear I was, as you suggested, 'temporarily insane.' Can you forgive my blunder ? "

" I have already pardoned you," she returned, giving his brown hand a slight, reassuring press. " It is now in order for us both to forget."

PART II.

PROBLEMATICAL INSANITY.

CHAPTER I.

MADEMOISELLE CLOTHILDE.

ESCANES and Herrick accompanied Major Suit to the Carbonate camp the day following the interesting journey to the peak. The Misses Bronson, having been summoned to Denver, and having departed in deep distress that very morning, Manitou held no decided attractions for the second young man referred to, while the first did not care particularly whether he remained or went away—it was necessary he should visit his native city before leaving the state, and it was just as well, he considered, to accompany Herrick and the Major. The trip was uneventful and the arrival without incident. The trio understood they were to meet Dorris, Mrs. Sowders and Aumerle in Southern Colorado in two weeks, and so parted company temporarily; Herrick and the Major confining their attention to the mines. Escanes greeted a few old friends warmly, and the majority, who considered themselves such, ironically, or even "cut" them; did a great amount of walking, much sneering, made himself generally unpopular, yet was looked upon with a great deal of respect and interest altogether, for a "lion" is bound to attract attention wherever he may roam. He went wherever fancy led—and fancy seemed to direct his steps to many queer and peculiar, if not somewhat disgusting, places. There were long, ill-smelling rooms, westernly termed "dance halls," where gaudy denizens exhausted themselves dancing on the rough floor, under the feeble lamps, and amid smoke so thick it resembled a harbor in a light fog. There were dirty little saloons with their political loungers; there were musty variety theatres. Into one of these places Escanes stumbled a few nights after his arrival. From narrow "private" boxes, arranged in a semi-circular row, came sounds of affected, jarring revelry. Around the small unsteady tables in the pit sat brown-faced miners who eagerly watched, and vehemently applauded the various "specialties." It was a strange place, with its cosmopolitan crowd, but an admirable, if possibly unprepossessing, spot for the easel of the artist who desired to paint character-study in the lower walks—and Escanes, unquestionably a pen-painter in this respect, knew its value of old. Where the followers of high society would have been disgusted, the novelist found a mine—what the artificial author would have pronounced useless, Escanes denominated "valuable."

Taking a crumpled play-bill from the floor, Penn noted that the attraction of the week was "M'lle Clothilde, *soprano magnifique.*" Mademoiselle, as became a star of brilliancy, occupied a place of honor last upon the programme. With a wandering curiosity as to who she might be, Escanes attempted to individualize her from the gaudy, gaily-decked creatures in the boxes, and finally decided upon a corpulent little Frenchwoman, who was vehemently conversing with an extremely tall individual in brown corduroys. Having settled this point to his evident satisfaction, the new-comer turned to glance at some of the *habitues* of the hall. He had taken a seat beside one of the tables in the rear. Directly opposite him was a young man—extremely young, with a boyish face—who seemed wholly out of his element amid the surroundings. Escanes scanned him keenly for a moment, and then the puzzled look leaving his face, reached over and tapped the youth on the shoulder.

" How are you Francois ? " he asked, extending his hand.

Somewhat startled, the boy drew back.

" Et es not my plaisure to know of you, saire," he began in broken English.

" No ? As I thought," remarked Escanes, with a sigh. " It's the same the world over. When I gave you the purse at Toulon last fall you swore you owed me an undying gratitude. I'm afraid your memory ended when the bottom of the purse was reached, my dear young Frenchman."

" Ah, et es Monsieur the Americain ! " cried the boy delightedly, rising and fervently grasping Escanes' outstretched hand. "But you have so changed, so——"

"What, in a few months, Francois?" asked Escanes laughing.

"Not in the face, Monsieur—not in the face. Et es, rather, what you call the garb, I believe. Your pardon I beseech, for my seeming rudeness."

"I accept your explanation," said his companion. "And will you kindly abstain from such demonstrativeness? You have lamed my wrist."

With a flow of "pardon, Monsieur," Francois seated himself again, regarding Escanes with bright, expectant eyes—the sudden meeting with one he could not but consider an old friend, quite overwhelming him. The scene at the galleys that warm autumn afternoon came vividly back to him—how ill, feeble, and almost dead, he was; the visit of the American, the novelist's interest in him; the stealthy dropping of the well-filled *porte-monnaie*, with the caution "use it well, if these dogs of guards will let you"—

he remembered every detail, every word used.

"How do you come here?" questioned Escanes suddenly. "What of the galleys?"

Francois turned pale. "I escaped," he said briefly, turning startled, questioning eyes to his companion's face.

"Well, I'm not distressed," muttered Escanes. "Those people were worse than brutes. Don't be afraid—your secret is safe with me."

"Monsieur is so kind," murmured Francois, passionately covering Escanes' hands with kisses.

"Don't mention it—and *please*, young man do not be so demonstrative," replied Penn, withdrawing his hand. "Such actions are looked upon with extreme disfavor in America. They will call you a 'crank,' if you persist in them. I hope you used the money to your advantage?"

"Without it I should have perished."

"Then I *have* been of some use in the world—at least through my ill-gotten gains," Escanes, muttered, half-sarcastically, congratulating himself. "Tell me why you are here?"

Francois' dark face grew even darker.

"Et es of my private affairs," he growled lowly.

"Very well, then," was the light reply, "I'm not troubling myself to any extent, and if you don't choose to gratify my curiosity—why, you needn't. I only hope you're not plotting mischief. I rather admired you when I met you in France, and never could reconcile myself to the belief that you committed the crime with which you were charged—but then, you young French terrors are up to anything."

The boy had started to his feet.

"I have committed no crime!" he cried angrily. "Et was her—that woman, the woman I will follow to the end of the world until I get justice. She is here to-night; I have seen her! I am here, and I am prepared!"

He had thrust his right hand into the pocket of his faded coat. For an instant there was a silvery-reflecting flash under the electric light. Escanes walked around the table and, seizing the panting boy by the shoulders, forced him into a chair.

"You are making an extraordinarily stupendous fool of yourself," he said calmly, "and are drawing attention. Give me that pistol quickly, there comes one of your worst enemies."

Attracted by the angry, but indistinguishable tones of Francois, a policeman had approached the two young men to inquire the cause of the seeming disturbance.

"It's all right, Jack," explained Escanes lightly, "my friend is a little under the weather—that's all," and, apparently satisfied, the man with the blue coat walked away.

"Never do that again," savagely warned the novelist. "You persist in making the queerest breaks—what's the matter with you?"

"Ah, Monsieur, you do not know—pray pardon me—pardon again," said the boy sadly.

"As many times as you wish, but for Heaven's sake keep within bounds."

Just then a small, gorgeously-dressed personage, with an offensive diamond and hugely-checked, expansive vest, came forward on the stage and announced, with rather an embarrassed air, that M'lle Clothilde would next appear. Madam was superb, was engaged for one week at an "enormous salary," would sing the latest operatic craze, and the diminutive manager expressed a heart-felt wish that his patrons would appreciate his enterprise. Whereupon there was a great amount of hooting a little applause, and a profound retiring bow the part of the man with the loud suit. At this point of proceedings, Francois was nervously endeavoring to restrain his passions. "Ef I was right," he muttered, "et will be her," and just at this point Escanes thought it advisable to hold the youth in his chair. He stood at the boy's back, pressing his hands firmly on the shoulders.

"Don't stir, or I'll give you over to the police the first thing," he cautioned, with more severity in his tone than he thought he could summon.

Escanes was fully guarded for any move of Francois, but was totally unprepared for the sensation M'lle Clothilde was destined to produce on him.

The insignificant orchestra played discordantly and low. A form, exquisitely attired in the pinkest of pink silks, glided from one of the entrances. There was a prolonged, loud clapping of hands and stamping of feet, and a superb soprano voice floated over the murky auditorium.

Escanes, who was engaged with the passionate young Frenchman when Clothilde entered, glanced quickly up in incredulous surprise. There was an intense, penetrating, puzzled look in his eyes at first, hard to understand. He was evidently mentally comparing the vision in pink with some one he knew, and gradually a depressing, settled conviction came over him, causing a horrible, low, strained cry to issue from his parted lips. Francois was forgotten; there was but one thing uppermost in his whirling brain—the woman in pink. In the midst of her song, M'lle Clothilde saw the two figures in the rear of the theatre. On its sweetest passage her exquisite voice faltered and sank to a note of intense terror. She suddenly turned and groped blindly for the wings, falling just as she reached them.

Escanes was awakened from his horrible stupor by the frenzied clutches of Francois, who, shaking with rage was searching the novelist's pockets for the weapon he had removed from the overcoat.

"Give it me—she shall not escape this time. My God, give it me or drive me mad!"

"Hush," admonished Escanes grimly, holding the boy's wrists like iron, "you must be quiet. Let us go."

And he pushed him unwillingly toward the door, leaving the audience in a state of wild confusion.

They paced the moonlit streets for hours—wandering aimlessly here and there. Finally, they found themselves in the centre of a broad road on a hill-top. They could note its white line to the west reaching up into the distant mountains, where it became lost in the trees. Below were the unsteady lights of the city, paling before the full moon. A white meteor went whirling from the heavens and was lost behind the southern hills.

"You know this woman, then—this female Janus?" demanded Escanes fiercely, breaking the silence which had existed between them.

"Know her! She is the woman who sent me to the galleys. She has of my existence made a torture. I meant to kill her to-night. I did not hesitate—you interfered," came sullenly from the boy, looking scowlingly down at the lights.

"Yes, but her name?"

"Ah, monsieur, that I do not know. Curse me for ignorance, I never learned it! *He* called her 'Do.'"

"Dorris?" almost screamed the excited man. "There must be some terrible, some awful mistake."

He laughed incoherently and staggered in the road. Francois, alarmed, supported him.

"It must have been fancy," he muttered, walking unconsciously where the boy led. "I am so weak to be upset by a trifle. But the likeness was so strong—so very strong."

"You know her too, monsieur?"

"I—I thought at first I did. There was something so remarkable in her resemblance to one with whom I am acquainted. But I must have been wrong; I *must* have been wrong."

They paused for a while to look down on the broad, sleeping city, and partially heard, in their confused, feverish brains, the subdued whirr of the machinery in the great Carbonate mines on the hills opposite them. Then, in the misty morning light, they walked unsteadily down the white boulevard and into the suburban streets.

CHAPTER II.

TWO ON A TOWER.

Late that day Escanes awoke, dulled, and with a feeling of general depression. In a vague way he attempted to review the events of the night, but they came only dimly back to him in a half-consequential form.

"What a peculiar thing it was," he said, half aloud, "even remarkable. But what a glorious idiot I must have made of myself while laboring under the absurd hallucination that it was Dorris. It is inconceivable! By the Bard, though, the French youngster won't let the thing rest. I wouldn't be in that woman's dainty shoes for a large amount."

He was even cheerful when he went down to dinner, although he could probably not have explained just why he should be. It was a great relief to consider how thoroughly impossible it was that the woman in pink should be Dorris Marston, and the more he considered it, the more decided did he become that it wasn't.

He even found himself wondering how he should have been so thrown out over it, and mentally denominated himself a "blundering ass" as he broke open his letters. One was from Jack, and was reserved until the last. When he took it up he was considerably surprised to note it was dated in Denver.

"I came here last evening," the letter ran, "and will probably stay until you are ready to go south. The most peculiar thing occurred at Manitou two days after you left. Going down to breakfast one morning I found a neat note awaiting me in the office. It was from Miss Marston. 'We have been called away suddenly,' it read; 'but will be in Potter's Gulch in two weeks, as we could not, of course, miss a visit to the Great Horn Spoon before leaving Colorado. We tried to see you last evening, after getting the telegram, but found you had retired."

“What do you think of that—not a word, not a hint as to where they went? Precious little information could I obtain from the hotel clerk. He knew they left that morning, believing, he said, for the south. The ticket-agents hadn’t the remotest idea of selling tickets to the ladies I described. At the telegraph office, for a liberal inducement, and on the strictly ‘q. t.,’ as I have heard you corruptly express it, I succeeded in learning from an addle-headed clerk that the telegram referred to came from Leadville—that’s what he said, and what he would have sworn to, had not the superintendent entered just then and thrust him into unmentionable obscurity with a fiercer look than you wear, even in your darkest mood. Of course the man was lying, as I should have known, but he held my inducement firmly in his pocket, nevertheless. There wasn’t much to be learned from the superintendent—‘it wasn’t his business to give information as to where telegrams were received from.’ He hinted strongly however, when I had bulldozed him into a milder mood, that he believed it was dated Denver.

Knowing that neither of the ladies had the least reason in the world to go to the Carbonate camp, but that they might have every reason to go to Denver, I came directly to this point. Not to 'follow them up,' exactly, my dear boy, but because Manitou is becoming inexpressibly dull. I am confident, however, that Miss Marston's neglect to state where she was going was due to her haste, and that both of the ladies would have been only too glad to have had me accompany them, were they given sufficient time to explain. One thing is certain, they are not in this city—or if they are, I have failed to discover them. Of course they are not with you—or are they and you trying to joke with me? I've half a mind to run up there and see for myself."

The effect of Aumerle's letter was anything but pleasing. Escanes' mind immediately resolved itself into a bewildered state greatly similar to what it was during the early morning. An endeavor to reason with himself proved wholly fruitless. Scarcely tasting his meal, he rushed out into the afternoon air. There was one determination uppermost—he would solve this mysterious, puzzling riddle. He went directly to the dirty theatre where the peculiar sensation of the night had occurred.

"Mademoiselle left this morning," said the loud little manager, somewhat sadly. "She was taken violently ill last night while on the stage, and this morning cancelled her engagement and boarded the train."

"Where did she go?"

"How should I know? Somewhere south, I believe, although I am not sure."

He cursed very strongly, and denounced the fair *artiste* soundly, but Escanes did not stop to listen to him. He was out in the street again, with the hot, dry wind blowing his tumbled locks over his forehead, and more bewildered than ever. He walked a great deal and became calmer—then returned to the hotel. He found Francois awaiting him.

"I have seen her," cried the boy fiercely—"she has gone."

"I know as much," returned Escanes.

"She left this morning," he went on rapidly and discordantly, "but I was too far away to kill her . . . . I was prepared again . . . . I am always prepared . . . . Some day we shall meet . . . . Meet alone . . . . I have no respect for this woman . . . . I shall kill her on sight . . . . If I am near enough . . . . She es beautiful . . . . I care not for beauty now . . . . Et es a stranger to me . . . . I—I believe I shall slowly choke her . . . . choking is so horrible . . . ."

Escanes stopped the wild, disconnected sentences, and drew the boy into an unoccupied writing-room.

"You are clearly insane on one subject, my young friend." He had tried to talk calmly, but decidedly had failed. His voice sounded so very harsh, so very like one that did not belong to him.

"Was she alone?" he asked absently. Somehow he was losing interest. What if it was Dorris? It didn't make any particular difference. Many people had double lives—why not she? Then he looked hard at a spot on the carpet—a bright red spot, caused by the overturning of ink. He realized, vaguely, that the stain should have been removed—somehow it seemed to be the only important thing to be done just then. He stared at it for a long time. Finally he wandered back to Dorris. She had seemed so gentle, so womanly, when they met in Manitou. What reason had she for playing this revolting *role?* To be sure he had no interest in the matter—no direct interest. But one could scarcely help admiring Dorris, and it was—was—all—so—strange. The thoughts seemed to pain as they slipped into his confused brain. He was dimly conscious that he had asked a question, and that his companion had answered it.

"What did you say?" he questioned.

"That she had an elderly companion—a lady. One I did not meet in France."

"Mrs. Sowders, probably," murmured Escanes. The intelligence did not surprise him—there was nothing to be surprised at now, nothing in the world. Every one was wicked, and deceitful and double-hearted—Dorris and every one. He tried to think of some one who was not, and his thoughts could only centre on Jack. Yes, Jack was honest—Jack *must* be honest: he had known him all his life. But Dorris, beautiful Dorris, what of her? Then he began wondering if Jack loved Dorris, and then he looked at the red spot on the carpet for a long, long time.

He was somewhat composed when he looked up.

"I think I am going mad," he said to Francois with forced calmness. "I believe I am going quite mad. This—this woman you hate—this murderess of whom you have told me, this woman who drove you to the galleys, is driving me insane. I was wrong this morning when I—when I lied to you. I *do* know her."

Francois seemed to note nothing peculiar in Escanes. He had sat with his face buried in his hands and had paid little attention to the man's rambling talk. He was mad himself—of that he was convinced.

"I am going to my room now," said Escanes, walking around to the boy's side. "I shall leave orders not to be disturbed. Here is one of my keys—I want you to wake me at 11 o'clock to-morrow. Do you understand—at 11 o'clock?"

The boy nodded and watched the man's slim figure until it had turned the winding staircase.

"He es mad—like me," he soliloquized. "He es fully as mad."

CHAPTER III.

BEGINNING TO PLOT.

HERRICK came down from the mines early the next day. He spent ten minutes trying to arouse Escanes, and was finally obliged to invoke the assistance of a bell-boy. Between them they managed to elicit a sleepy "well?" just as Herrick was getting a little frightened.

"You certainly sleep soundly enough," remarked the young man, when Escanes had finally wakened enough to stumble over to the door and open it.

"You had a key," he muttered, staggering toward the bed, "there was no necessity for making a scene."

"I had a key? Guess you're mistaken aren't you?"

Escanes noted who it was.

“ Oh, it’s you, Herrick.”

“ Resembles me slightly, I think,” he replied, throwing up the blind, and letting a flood of sunshine into the darkened room. Then he turned toward the bed. “ For Heaven’s sake, Penn, what’s wrong? Have you commenced keeping late hours again, or are you ill?”

“ Both,” returned the man in bed, turning his dull eyes toward the visitor. His face was intensely white, and contracted by hard, firm lines. He seemed to have suddenly aged. “ I have had an unenviable experience, Herrick, and have been a little nervous, that’s all. No doubt I will be myself before long.”

He said the words coldly and with no show of expression.

“ Here is a note some one left with the clerk for you. I thought I’d bring it up.”

Herrick was rather surprised at the unaccountable change in his friend, and noted how unsteady his hand were as he tore open the note. A small key fell from the letter.

"MONSIEUR—Your pardon for the step I am taking. I am resolved to find this woman who has wronged me. I will search to the end of the world.

"FRANCOIS."

Escanes tore the letter into small, shapeless pieces with his nervous fingers, and flung them on the coverlet.

"He is a fool," muttered the novelist, rising to dress.

Herrick went to the window and stood looking down into the busy street.

"I suppose you met Miss Marston?" he questioned idly. He merely asked it as a matter of form and hardly expected an answer. There could be no doubt of Escanes having seen her, he considered.

"Miss Marston?" Somehow the name jarred on the man by the wash-stand. It had caused him so much trouble of late. But he managed to repeat it interrogatively.

"Yes—is it possible you didn't meet her?" was the surprised reply. "She stopped at this hotel, Mrs. Sowders with her. They were up at the mine yesterday. Uncle told them you were here, too, and they said or I think they said, they met you." He would have added something about jesting, but saw, by his companion's manner, that there was no suggestion of a joke.

"At this hotel?" repeated Escanes, hoarsely. "You say they were here?"

"Certainly—their names are registered; what in thunder is the matter with you anyhow, Penn? I suppose it was mere chance that kept you apart, although it is decidedly queer, both living in the same building."

Escanes threw down the towel with an exclamation of disgust. "There is nothing the matter with me, Herrick," he said firmly. I have been outrageously treated, have been a confounded fool, and—and—well, I've had troubled dreams."

"I am inclined to think you have," observed the young gentleman.

There was no mistaking Herrick's assertion. "Miss Marston, Mrs. Sowders, Providence, R. I." were as legible on the hotel register as Dorris's dainty hand could make them. The names had been placed there Tuesday. It was now Thursday.

Escanes felt decidedly sheepish when he saw them, and reflected that he had neglected to search for Miss Marston where it was more than probable he would find her—in the hotel.

Then he became angry at her. There was no disguising her deceit. She had even lied to Major Suit and Herrick when she said she met him. Then, gradually, his incomprehensible bewilderment changed to a feeling of the utmost contempt for this fair young woman. He could even hate her, and became quite cheerful in the reflection. He mapped out a course to pursue,—very romantic, very sensational, and quite in keeping with the heavy man of a novel. He would follow Miss Marston whereever she went, and turn up abruptly just at the wrong time. He would, unsuspected, do several things of an exciting and highly interesting nature.

"Do Dorris and Mrs. Sowders still think of going to Potter's Gulch?"

"Oh, yes; they're quite enthusiastic over it.

That's why I came down from the mine, to-day," replied Herrick, across the dinner-table. "Uncle intends starting for the south to-morrow night, and wants you to be ready to go with him. He has written to Denver, and the ladies intend meeting Jack there and going straight down with him on Monday."

"And you?"

"Oh, I shall not go until the end of next week," answered Herrick, turning very red. "You see Uncle wants a sort of—well, a sort of summer party. He has fixed his new house all over, you know, and—and he said I might invite the Misses Bronson, if I thought proper—and provided their father improved. I guess he is improving, for Gladys—the elder Miss Bronson—wrote me yesterday she thought Jo and herself would join the party. Uncle said it would be so much more interesting to have a large number spend the summer in the Gulch."

"No doubt," returned Escanes, dryly, privately determining to make matters interesting for one of the party at least.

CHAPTER IV.

PLANS OF CAMPAIGN.

Penn and the Major left for the south by a torturously slow train—one that wound in and out of the canyons and along the mountain sides at a snail-like pace, and seemed to have no particular destination and no particular time in which to reach it. It was a mountain "accommodation," and passengers were supposed to make the "best of it" *en tour*. The Major did not prove very congenial company. There were but six passengers in the narrow car, and of these, five, including Major Suit, performed that distinctly American feat of "burying themselves in their newspapers" directly the train started. The sixth was the ever-restive Penn, who wandered back and forth in the aisle, attempted once or twice to make a comfortable bed on the hard seats, failed, and finally went out on the rear platform and seated himself on a low step. At the bottom of the grade the river crept sluggishly along, eddying around the huge boulders, and sparkling cool and green where its progress was unimpeded by the ungainly rocks. On the mountain grades the progress was so slow the travellers might have walked. Suddenly there was a grating, irritating noise, extending in one long sweep from the engine to the rear of the line. The train rocked, Escanes was precipitated to the ground, and the row of cars came to a standstill. In a little pile, in the very centre of the track, lay a number of wooden steps.

"I guess you're not hurt," remarked the brakeman with a grin, as he removed the pile of steps in a very business-like manner, threw them on the platform, and motioned the engineer to move on.

"N—no, I suppose not," returned the man addressed. "Not if you say I'm not."

"Never had an accident on this road yet," said the brakeman threateningly.

No? I imagine that was merely a matter of form, then? Some one receives instructions to push a boulder down on the track every time a train passes, I suppose,—or are the boulders advised as to the proper time and paid for their services accordingly?"

"No 'casion fer you to complain," grumbled the brakeman, "you didn't get hurt."

"You have told me that, and I am under obligations for the information," sarcastically; "but I believe, however, I am the best judge in the matter. My right wrist has been sprained."

The brakeman brought a chair to the platform for the passenger, and busied himself binding the wrist. There was a slight cut, beside the sprain, which bled profusely.

"No rock ever hit th' engine on this road yit," observed the brakeman, bound to exonerate something or somebody.

"Extremely fortunate, I'm sure. I suppose it costs the 'road' as you put it, a great deal for steps, however?"

"Well, yes—we *do* sometimes get knocked out on them things. Nobody was ever killed though, and they fix it all right in the back shops."

Tying the bandage tightly, the manipulator of brakes went whistling into the car, with the joyous consolation that he had done his duty, and that the stranger couldn't possibly sue that great corporation known collectively as "the road."

The injured American has not the privilege of his English cousin—especially the western American. He has no right, under any circumstances, according to the prevailing, if not popular custom, to remonstrate, to any forcible degree, against the treatment he receives on a railway train. He may grumble to himself, and insist on the gentleman in front lowering the window. He may throw out sundry hints at the management and announce his preference for the other system. He may go so far, but instantly realizes that there it must end. Every American, when he boards a railway train, believes that the "road" has his life at its mercy, and only suggests the advisability of having the remains shipped to the nearest point conducive to decent interment. After the irritation consequent upon the first shock, Escanes dismissed the matter from his mind—the only thing to be considered was his safe arrival at whatever place the train chose to stop.

Naturally his thoughts turned on Dorris—the main trouble seemed to be in keeping them from turning on her. The whole thing seemed so incomprehensible, so unheard of, so wholly unusual. His first shock having worn away, after its attendant miseries, almost culminating in insanity so sudden and peculiar was it, his attention now diverted to things consequent. The outcome was to be a matter of consideration which, to fathom, seemed wholly unreasonable and improbable. He had better let things take their course, he considered, rather than make an artificial blunder. Map and measure as he would, he could not, somehow, force himself to dwell upon the downfall of that peculiar woman, Dorris Marston. After a time he began wondering how she would receive him when first they met—what plausible story she would invent to blind the others and, perhaps, attempt to blind him. He began asking himself if he loved her and thought, once, that he did. Then he laughed harshly, and said it was wholly out of the question. Yet he didn't desire to be cruel with her—she might be bad, even black-hearted, a skilled adventuress, though so young in years, but there was no necessity for making sensational scenes. He might go quietly to her while she was alone and tell her it was best for her to leave. Then he began thinking of Francois' horrible story in France, and found himself doubting the sensational words. Where was that brother the boy had spoken of? Why should the murder have been committed? Was there a murder? If so, was she really implicated? Had she not attempted to shield her brother by accusing Francois—was not that the only way out? Yet why should she have adopted a *nom de plume*, and appeared as a mere ballad singer in a disreputable theatre of the lower class? The riddle was so complicated—so unsatisfactory. It was merely a series of questions presenting themselves with rapid order, each one more puzzling than the first and each a strong argument for itself. Attempt to balance the bad with the good as he might, the revolting seemed to quickly overthrow the better part, without more than the mere repetition of a question. One thing he decided upon—he would not be hasty. Black as the matter was, he must have grounds more relative. Then his thoughts went back to the Manitou meeting. Then he slowly reviewed the whole thing with a wonderful clearness and calmness. And then, the train having crept cautiously over a high bridge and started in a winding course around another mountain, his thoughts were diverted by the familiar grating sound, and the right side of the cars were relieved of their steps.

"I guess you'd better go in," suggested the brakeman as he threw the wood on the car and kicked the boulder into the river, "they generally strike the rear platform the third time."

And Penn decided it a wise thing to act on the suggestion.

PART III.

GROUNDS MORE RELATIVE.

CHAPTER I.

POTTER'S GULCH.

Potter's Gulch bore a remarkable similarity too ther gulches. It was long, hedged in by enormous mountains whose sides sloped abruptly; began at the foot-hills with a wide and commendable intention, but gradually went back on good resolutions and culminated in a narrow, unattractive ravine, seven miles from the starting point. A creek traced its way the entire length over a pebbly, sandy bed. The head of Potter's gulch was twenty miles from the End of the World. The End of the World was an insignificant village in one of southern Colorado's many dry, extensive parks, and was chiefly known to fame as the terminus of the narrow little railroad. The method of transit to Gibson, from the End of the World, was by stage—a dirty stage, covered with white dust and drawn by four dispirited horses. Gibson, an ambitious mining camp, with no possible reason for being ambitious, could be found just one mile from the entrance to Potter's Gulch, and consisted of thirty-three wooden houses, ranging from ground-floor affairs in the lower quarter, to barn-like, ghostly-looking stores on the high street.

Gibson himself was a "prospector," who stumbled into Potter's Gulch even before it was Potter's Gulch. Nobody knew exactly who Potter was, but some alleged he had been a no less illustrious person than Gibson's partner. Some one said, also, that the Indians scalped Potter, but that Gibson escaped and came down into a gulch after three days' aimless wandering over the flat-tops. Surface indications tended to show there was mineral somewhere on one of the sloping mountain-sides and Gibson "staked out" a "claim," writing on a large piece of poplar: "Gibson's property in Potter's Gulch," and burning it into the wood. Gibson presumably left the country after completing his first year's assessment. He never returned—at least he never recorded his return, if he did. When a little band of adventurers struck "pay ore" in the place, years after the burned signboard was discovered they created a small boom in their way, and the camp of Gibson sprung up like a mushroom. For a year matters were rather lively and then gradually settled. Everything was a venture, so far as mining pretensions went, and many of the first families left for other alluring mining-camps and their transparent inducements. So Gibson was left by the world to slowly and naturally die, and became a poky, settled little place, with only its reminiscences to command occasional attention. Once in a while a stranger would study the historic burnt-board, and agitate the questions: "Who was Gibson, and what did Potter have to do with Gibson?" but never received much satisfaction. Some one would tell him, in a scattered, circumstantial way, a story of a flat-top massacre, but could never explain just how it occurred or where it was. It was understood that a literary lady who was forced, through circumstances of a pecuniary nature, to remain in Gibson the whole of one summer, had written an essay on the "Probabilities and Improbabilities of an Impossibility," which related directly to Gibson himself, and was the outcome of a study of the board, but it never appeared.

Major Suit had interested Aumerle *fils* in Potter's Gulch during the boom. The Great Horn Spoon, located four miles above Gibson, was the result, and the Gibson patriarchs looked upon the venture with extreme disfavor. The Major, assisted financially, was grossly indiscriminative. He did an unheard-of thing in having erected near the mine a commodious dwelling-house, fitted with all the modern improvements procurable in that obscure portion of western remoteness. It had gables, and a lookout, and was painted a gorgeous combination of buff and blue. A pioneer Gibsonite who walked into the parlor one day, was horrified to note that the room was papered, carpeted and furnished with plush easy-chairs. More than this, he caught a glimpse of a rosewood piano in a spacious room beyond, and could not fail to see that the door panels and base-boards had been grained.

"I propose to live in comfort," explained Major Suit to Aumerle *fils*, "your money did this, but I'm going to make it even when the Spoon pans out. Any time you want a nice little family party here in the summer, there's plenty of room for 'em, and I'm sure they're welcome."

Aumerle *fils* relied on the Major. He had much to do with the success of the Hindoo and Consolidated deal, and must not be forgotten at any cost. Privately, however, he was considerably shaken in this last venture and its modern dwelling accompaniment.

But Potter House, as the Major loyally, yet unreasonably, called it, was a delightfully roomy one. When he spoke of it to his Denver and Carbonate Camp friends he found himself at some trouble in explaining it was not a hotel. He was frequently forced to diagram the apartments, and then announce that he "had imported an English custom in naming it."

Penn was charmed with the place, and told the Major so.

"You've got sense," beamed that individual, "No use 'n roughin', even in this gulch."

What a glorious summer we could spend," mused the novelist, "if—" and there he ended.

The day before the ladies arrived the Major came enthusiastically to Escanes: "I believe we've got it in the second drift of the fourth level," he announced with fervor. "I'm goin' to increase the force by two men and telegraph for 'em at once!"

"How many men have you now?"

"Eleven - that'll make our force——"

"Thirteen - are you superstitious?"

"No!" thundered the little man. "I'm goin' to make a great mine out of the Spoon; superstition and expense are no object."

Toward dusk he came to Penn again.

"There's no doubt of it," he said, "the mineral's there! Say, Escanes, you don't suppose Aumerle would object if I made it an even fourteen, do ye? The men at the mine say thirteen ain't a good number to have round."

"I don't think Aumerle will object to anything so long as he can pay for it—make it a great mine; it won't cost *you* anything."

CHAPTER II.

OVER THE COFFEE CUPS.

California Dave washed the stage coach!

When he drove through Gibson, late in the afternoon, with the great lumbering vehicle shining red in the golden sun, just as it did in the early days, there was a general rush for windows and a general exclamation of surprise. But the cleanly coach, with its silver and red glory, attracted attention for only a moment. There was a young lady in a brown travelling cloak—a bright-faced young lady, who was interested in everything and asked innumerable questions—sitting on the high box-seat. Within, another young lady sat on the front seat, hanging dismally to a dingy leather strap, and opposite her was yet another young lady, to speak nothing of an elderly lady in the centre and a young man at one side.

"No passengers fer you ter-day," grinned Dave at the hotel where he stopped to deposit the mail sack. "The boom's gone outer the hull town I reckon."

"No? we rather expected some one, too," returned a very thin man, evidently the postmaster, for he took the sack and threw it into the office. He spoke in a questioning tone, and directed his eyes expressively toward the interior of the coach.

"Th' parties Major Suit's a been expectin'," returned Dave *sotto voce*, whipping up the blacks.

The entry at the gate of Potter House was an imposing one. Penn watched it from an upper window. First came Jo down from her high seat, scorning assistance, and throwing open the coach door. Gladys, tired, and with an exclamation of relief at the journey's end, stepped down, and was followed by Aumerle, who jumped lightly out, and assisted Mrs. Sowders. Then, cautiously, came Dorris, her light travelling wrap blowing back and disclosing, briefly, an expanse of her gray, clinging dress. Penn noticed she appeared worn and fatigued, and once, when she stumbled in the path, fell against Aumerle with a convulsive little grasp at his coat lappels, plainly showing she was nervous, and possibly dispirited. "Was she thinking of the coming meeting?" asked Escanes with a feeling of half-exultation, half-pity, as he left the window and went downstairs.

They entered the house just as people in the ordinary walks of life usually do enter—there was nothing sensational, nothing even dramatic. Escanes met them in the hall.

"How are you, old fellow," said Aumerle shaking hands heartily.

"Oh, Penn, we've had a delightful trip on that dear old stage coach!" came from enthusiastic Jo.

"Dear old fiddlesticks! It was perfectly awful, and my head aches," complained Gladys.

Dorris gave him a bright, brief nod, and passed into the parlor.

"You seem almost a total stranger," remarked Mrs. Sowders warmly. "We were *so* sorry not to have met you in Leadville, but you see we were busy straightening up Dorris's matters—you know her Uncle Paul was interested there at the time of his death—and suppose you were engaged on matters of your own." She chatted on as Penn followed her into the room, but he scarcely understood what she was saying. There was a busy time with wraps, and questions innumerable, all of which Major Suit was supposed to answer at once, and with entire satisfaction to the interrogators.

The scene at the dinner-table was one that certainly did the Major's heart good. Potter House was now just what he had ever desired to see it—a place for the assemblage of jovial young people. He beamed from the head of the table and insisted on ruining the digestion of everyone present.

Fate, and the blunder of the yellow-skinned waiter, placed Dorris and Penn side by side.

"I suppose Auntie has told you we were in Leadville—I am extremely sorry we did not meet you, but we were in a terrible rush during our short stay, and had to get to Denver."

She spoke very calmly, and in quite a matter-of-fact tone. Penn leaned toward her—unmanneredly, but earnestly:

"I believe I *did* meet you," he said.

"Indeed? Where, and why did you not speak?" came surprisedly.

"You were not exactly in a position conducive to my addressing you," he replied. He was becoming rather ill at ease. He had desired to impress her that, no matter how cleverly she might blindfold others, he at least was alive to her motives.

"And may I ask how such a peculiar thing came about?"

She glanced over her coffee-cup with a trace of mirth in her large, clear eyes.

"You were some distance up the street—you and Mrs. Sowders, I attempted to overtake you, but was suddenly stopped by an acquaintance and, by the time I excused myself to hurry after you, both had disappeared. It was the last day of your stay in the city."

He lied—unhesitatingly. When he thought the matter over he wondered how he could have done otherwise, with her beautiful eyes looking into his.

"We have had *such* adventures," said Miss Marston after a pause, "ever since you left us at Manitou. It seems there can hardly be a point in the state we have not touched—Uncle Paul had so many interests in Colorado. Do you believe," she asked, "That the Horn Spoon really amounts to anything?"

"Not being a judge of mines myself—although I am sorry to confess it—I really cannot say. The Major assured me yesterday, however, that he really believes 'pay ore' has been reached. At any rate he has increased or shortly will increase, his working force by the addition of three men."

"So many?" she asked laughingly.

"The Major couldn't take more trouble if he was employing an army," he returned.

"The Major says we must visit the mine," called Mrs. Sowders from her seat near that distinguished man, and breaking into the general conversation without discord — for, of course, they were all speaking of the mine.

"Wallie will be here to-morrow—we must wait for him," cautioned Jo, fearing some plan might be agreed upon in the unravelling of which that interesting young man would have no interest. "It was horridly mean of you, Major, to make him stay in Denver to attend your poky old business."

"And we promised we wouldn't do a single thing until he came," remarked Gladys.

"Then we won't," said the Major. "The mine can wait."

"Somebody should do something," decided Jo, when the little company was variously distributed throughout the warm parlor that evening. She was wishing Herrick was present—then there would hardly be a need for such a suggestion.

"You might sing us something," observed the Major.

"Oh, I'm perfectly awful at singing — I couldn't possibly," said the young woman, retiring to Aumerle's corner.

"Dorris sings very well," volunteered Mrs. Sowders. "Won't you oblige us, dear?" she asked, looking over her spectacles. The *chaperone* had already produced her "lace work" and presented the appearance of an industrious matron with her busy needles.

Dorris went to the rosewood piano. She struck a few chords, and then sang, with intense sweetness and feeling, a ballad that never grows old—the song of all nations, "Kathleen Mavourneen." Her magnificent soprano voice swelled and diminished; it filled every corner, every nook, every heart in the big room. It floated out into the night air and reached the ears of the engineer at the mine. The little shaft wheel seemed even to pause from its dizzy whirl, and the whirling machinery became stilled. The song throbbed, pulsed with feeling, and ended like a softly-dying zephyr.

It was very quiet as she finished—somehow, none of the little party cared to talk much. They congratulated Dorris, of course, but a wonderful calmness seemed to fall over them all—a sort of charm, which they feared to break. It was not long before subdued good-nights were uttered, followed by a general rush for the sleeping rooms.

For a long time the bright fire outlined a figure in black—the figure of a man, with bowed head and clasped hands. There was scarcely a move to be noticed, so steadfastly did he gaze at the long strip of red stone on the hearth. All at once he was startled by a half-stifled exclamation, and turned to see Dorris softly entering the room. She had just left the fantastic curtains in the door, which were now half parted, and her slight, graceful form stood out strongly in the dancing light.

"I thought you were a burglar," she said with a smile.

"You flatter me."

"Nonsense—I scarcely expected to find anyone here, and you startled me at first. Auntie mislaid her needles, and is confident—ah, here they are now. I really believe she would go insane if her needles were lost over night—she would certainly lose a great amount of necessary rest."

Miss Marston picked up the tiny bits of steel with their lace attachment and walked over to the fireplace.

"And why are you sitting up so late, may I ask? Plotting?"

"Yes," he replied, "plotting deeply."

"I suppose you are fashioning some new novel—absorbing in interest, intricate in plot and dazzling with wit; these are the chief things to be considered now-a-days, I believe, when one writes novels."

"I am not so sure about the wit—I shall certainly endeavor to make it interesting."

"Thrilling?"

"Perhaps so—it will open with a murder."

"How horrible!"

"Yes; an unusual crime. A party of three visit a small village in France—husband and wife, but recently wedded, and a brother of the bride. The husband is old—his wife does not love him. Her brother finally excites her to a state of absolute dislike, and together they murder him, fastening the crime on a boy who had been the devoted attendant of Monsieur. He is sent to the galleys, while Madame—who was formerly but a commonplace American girl, with no fortune excepting possibly, her prepossessing face—aided by her brother, enjoys her ill-gotten wealth. This is but the prologue—but, pshaw! how can my tedious stories interest you?"

"They *do* interest me greatly," she replied, seating herself in a huge cushioned rocker, just opposite him, and full in the firelight. "Portions of them at least. What occurs after the prologue? I suppose the heroine—or *is* she the heroine?—lives a life of remorse and enters a convent just as a distinguished young man becomes enamored of her."

"Hardly that. She is a scheming adventuress. Reckless living causes her husband's fairy gold to magically vanish. She adopts the stage as a profession, appearing in low theatres in the remote west. She leads a double life, pretending, when she believes there is no possibility of discovery, to be a rich eastern heiress. She hoodwinks all but one—a young man whose position in the story I have not decided upon, but believe I will make a novelist, or something of that sort. He will, of course, thwart her plans, and she may—yes, *may* enter a convent."

He was looking at her intently as she endeavored to re-arrange the fancy work she had disordered. He had expected her to start, to leave the room—to faint, perhaps. He had expected something—what, he scarcely could tell, but something of an unusual nature. She merely bent over her lace with steady fingers, only looking up when he paused, with an expression of honest curiosity in her eyes.

"Doesn't the galley-slave come to light?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he said with a slight intonation of disgust—the scene he had counted on creating a dramatic climax having failed so utterly as to make him thoroughly despondent, "I suppose he will have to do something; I haven't quite decided what—you see my story is somewhat vague as yet."

"Decidedly vague," she responded rising. "I think it wildly improbable, and do not believe it will attract half the attention your other books have."

"I intend to bring out her dual personality with exceptionally strong force," he said somewhat warmly. "That is where I shall make my hit. It surely is not so 'wildly improbable' as you say. It is not an unusual thing for one to lead a double life."

"No, I think we all have two natures," she said thoughtfully, "the one almost exactly opposite the other—in some cases, of course. In others it is not so strongly marked. But are there not other roads for your heroine to follow when she becomes penniless—why should she adopt a concert hall? Your readers will scarcely appreciate the character."

"I do not intend they shall. That is one of my main reasons for carrying the matter so far. For my own part I detest a woman who would stoop so low, as badly as you would detest her."

His eyes were looking straight into hers. She regarded him steadily, thoughtfully.

"I do not believe I should detest her exactly," was the slow reply. "Of course there could be no defense of her action. I would pity, rather than scorn."

Then she looked toward the fire and smiled.

"Here we are, discussing your imaginary heroines and Mrs. Sowders probably wild with apprehension lest I have come to harm. Good-night—if you come to any satisfactory conclusion regarding the disposal of your characters, let me know!"

The drapery closed behind her, and he heard her go softly up the stairs. Then, more bewildered, more puzzled, even resentful, he turned to the fire again, and studied its red changing depths.

CHAPTER III.

CONFIDENTIAL.

WHEN a party of eight, equally divided as to sex, are practically isolated from the world for an entire summer, it is hardly possible to avert the arrows of a peculiar little god usually supposed to be invisible. When the party is largely made up of young people, it is more than impossible—it is wholly improbable.

"I want to ask your advice about something," said Herrick going to Escanes' room one day and cautiously closing the door—"something that is very important."

Penn motioned him to a seat, but he evidently preferred standing, for he disregarded the movement and looked toward the window.

"I'm in a fix," he remarked uneasily.

"Yes? Well, you are not alone in that respect, Wallie. It's a very difficult one I suppose?"

"Very—it's about love."

"Then there is no doubt of it."

"I came to you because I've known you so long and,—and had no one else to go to," stammered the young man.

"Perfectly proper. Delicate matters require delicate fingers."

"Th— that's what I thought. Well—" straightening himself and concentrating his gaze on the pine tree beside the window, "it's just this: I don't know which one I like best!"

"*Which one*—to whom do you refer?"

"Why *they*, of course. Haven't you seen? Jo and Gladys."

Startling as it seemed in Herrick's eyes, Penn had not "seen."

There were other love affairs than Wallie's.

"And it's the question of 'which'?"

"Yes,—you see sometimes I think it's Jo and sometimes Gladys—although I haven't seen much of Gladys since I came down here; she's always with Jack," he complained. "Jo is awfully jolly, but she says 'horrid' so much I am beginning to dislike her. If she didn't say that I don't believe I'd hesitate a minute!"

"You are a very queer young man," observed Penn soberly, turning in his chair, "and this is an exceedingly important and ponderous matter. You must give me time to think it over. I will weigh the relative merits of these young ladies and give you my decision before the end of the week—that is, if you haven't arrived at a conclusion yourself and still believe I am capable of judging. How will that do?"

Herrick turned his eyes from the tree and grasped his companion's shoulders enthusiastically.

"Penn, you're just the man I wanted—you are a brick!"

It was a day of surprises. During the afternoon Jack and Escanes met in the library. Jack was uneasy and evidently puzzled.

"I wish you'd tell me something," he

blurted, biting his moustache and running his hand through his hair.

"Certainly—the Washington monument is 550 feet in height—the largest structure in the world barring the Eiffel tower, at least so this Universal Guide to Everything, tells me. Is that the class of information you desire?"

"Oh pshaw—of course it isn't."

"Then enlighten me. I'm the oracle of the house evidently—to-day, at least."

"Well; if you once loved a—a—well, a rather nice young lady—that is, if you *thought* you loved her—and one day, on a mountain —"

Penn's expressive eyebrows went two degrees in height.

"Well, in a valley—somewhere, anywhere," blundered the confessor. "Don't look at me while I tell you this, you get me confused. It's a delicate subject."

Penn obligingly scanned the long rows of leather-bound wisdom to his right.

"If you thought you loved her, and in a moment of indiscretion proposed to her and she—well, didn't exactly refuse, but spoke as though you were a blamed idiot running wild, what would you think?"

"I should think she did not admire me."

"But if, after you recovered from your first passion, and decided you did not love her and found some one else you believed—honestly believed—you really *did* love, do you think the —the other young woman would have a broken heart; or anything like that? She might get to thinking she *did* admire me, you know."

"I don't believe I would worry if I were in your place, Jack."

He spoke almost joyously, exultantly. His one doubt was removed—Aumerle had recovered from his Manitou passion.

"Miss Marston is not of the heart-breaking order—she has had far too much experience for that."

"B—but the way she appears lately. She seems quite desolate."

"Is that so?" asked Escanes quickly. "I hadn't noticed it."

"I thought perhaps it was on my account; but I suppose I am an old 'poke' for ever letting it enter my head. And I really admire Gladys."

"Then you had better persist in your admiration," decided Penn, shaking him warmly by the hand.

The conversation had both pleased and puzzled Escanes. With what he knew, or believed he knew, of Miss Marston's history, he had decided she was little better than an adventuress of the very worst type. Calm deliberation had told him she was heartless and designing, despite her seeming innocence. He had supposed her ultimate object was to secure, through as hasty a marriage as possible, Aumerle's wealth. He had wished to, in some way, avert this without openly denouncing the young woman as a criminal. Jack's unintentional remark concerning her action on the mountain had completely thrown his pet idea to the winds, making the case all the more complicated, although relieving him immensely. Escanes could not deny he loved Miss Marston. He even respected her, while yet the blot, black and ineffaceable, was constantly before him with all its seeming truth. The riddle of the Sphinx could not confound him more than this self-possessed young woman.

"Confession is ever good for the soul;"—he feared, yet desired Dorris to speak of her crime. He felt she could not be wholly guilty, and the thought that this invisible brother of her's might really be the light, the key, to the whole seemingly insoluble matter, was ever uppermost.

Seven weeks' association with her at Potter House had developed absolutely nothing. Cleverly planned remarks, suddenly directed toward her at opportune moments, had failed to bring even the slightest acknowledgment of their meaning from her. They were on the cliffs one day, looking down at the discolored, swollen stream, surging along a hundred feet below. He had attempted a *ruse*, had been wholly unsuccessful and doubly mystified. He had all but accused her of double dealing, fearing, as he ever did, of learning the truth.

"I wish I could understand you," he had said, at length, in desperation.

"There is so very little about me to understand that you would not be repaid for your trouble. And as for that matter, why don't you understand me? Other people do!"

He did not know what reply to make. It was seldom he did, when she spoke like that—half disgustedly, half scornfully, as though he were trying to make a puzzle out of something that was clearly logical.

Occasionally he would attempt to draw something from Mrs. Sowders, but very rarely, it must be confessed, for he found conversation with her very tedious and not inspiring. She knew nothing—absolutely nothing—or else knew a great deal and knew enough not to tell it. She was wholly at sea when Penn began to throw out morbid hints of murders at St. Mathilde and variety actresses at Leadville, and in time began to privately believe literature had driven the young man insane. She spoke of "Dorris' Uncle Paul," when family connections were touched upon, and delighted in reminiscences of that eccentric individual. But as a source for the information Escanes sought, Mrs. Sowders was uninterestingly dry.

Now that Aumerle had assisted in making confusion more confounded, Escanes was at a loss which way to turn, and lay back in his chair after his friend quitted the library, endeavoring to collect his somewhat hazy thoughts.

The harsh scraping of hoofs on the graveled roadway caused him to look up. As he did so, a horse dashed by the open window, and from her neat seat Dorris waved a farewell. Her handkerchief and a scrap of paper fluttered to the ground, but the horse galloped on, and its rider was evidently none the wiser for the slight mishap. Penn went out and picked them up. The note was addressed to Miss Dorris Marston, and was mailed at Gibson—and Dorris was then going in the direction of Gibson.

"It is either more mystery, or a milliner's bill," decided Penn. He could easily have read the note, but its contents were not intended for him, and were not supposed to concern him. A perusal might have cleared the mystery, possibly, and he might have known it, yet he did what any man of honor would have done under the circumstances — kept both the handkerchief and note, and presented them to the young lady when she returned.

He met her in what Major Peck designated the "general room," but which would have served its purpose quite as well under the name of parlor. He noted, quickly, that she was looking pale, worn, and even distressed.

"I fear your ride rather did you more harm than good," he said, after her warm "thank you; how stupid of me to lose them," on receiving the lost articles.

"Do *you* notice it?" she asked, with a forced attempt at her usual brightness. "Yes, indeed; I fear I went too far—and I am somewhat unused to the exercise."

She did not appear at the dinner table, pleading, through her *chaperone*, a slight attack of physical prostration, brought on by the ride. Her absence was noticed, of course, but passed over. Jack was too greatly engrossed reviewing the events of the day with Gladys to notice any particular falling off from the usual number at the table. The Major was attempting to explain to Mrs. Sowders the relative value of ores, and the more elaborately he dwelt upon them, further to sea did Mrs. Sowders' brain-craft drift. Jo and Wallie were fully engaged. Only Penn really felt, with something like a disappointed pang, the vacancy in the party. The meal seemed to drag terribly, and he was more than relieved when it ended.

Herrick pushed him to one side before leaving the dining-room.

"Well?" he interrogated, eagerly.

"Marry Jo, young man; I believe you love her better than the other."

"I'm glad you said that, for I'm beginning to believe I *do* like Jo a little the best—but Gladys is a nice girl, just the same. Thank you ever so much, old fellow."

He went off, whistling softly, evidently believing Escanes had conferred a favor on him he could never repay.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDERGROUND.

"We are developing the south drift in the fourth level," announced the Major with mining mysticism to the little party gathered in the shaft house, "and I believe we may as well confine our exploration to that and the third level—inasmuch as the other two are not being worked," he added, *sotto voce.* "Now, since we can't all go down at once, I would suggest the advisability of splitting up the party. Miss Jo—"

"Oh, I don't want to go first," exclaimed that young lady, retreating in dismay. "I—I am not sure I want to go at all."

"Nonsense—just as easy as goin' down the elevator in a hotel," proclaimed the Major.

"I will go first," declared Dorris, smiling at Jo.

She stepped on to the square little platform which completely fitted the great hole and shut out its blackness, and was followed by Gladys, timidly, but with a vague resolution that she would do or die. Then came Jack, then Herrick, and then the mine superintendent, a tall, jolly-faced individual in brown. The little party of five, with their slouch hats and greasy mining coats, presented an appearance so ludicrous that Jo ventured nearer the platform to examine and jest over them. Then came the signal and the erect figures were lowered swiftly and noiselessly into the deep mine. There was nothing to be seen—a pitchy darkness shut out even the faces of those on the cage as the soft upcurrent of air brushed them. The journey was surprisingly short and without incident, yet Hanlon, the superintendent, informed the quartette they were four hundred feet below the earth's surface, when the elevator gently stopped at a high opening directly in front of them. It was the third level. They had passed two others so securely barred that not the slightest intimation of their being there came to mind. The third level sloped away from the shaft in two opposite tunnels. A dim lantern hung at the junction, throwing a sickly, weird light over the objects before it.

"The Major knows the mine and can attend to the others," said Hanlon, ringing for the cage to be hoisted. The short candles in their steel, sharp-pointed holders were lighted, and the superintendent led the way through the tunnel to the right, followed, in order, by Penn, Dorris, Jack and Gladys. Massive beams of wood, supporting the uneven, hard roof, rose on them at each side as they proceeded. Narrow planks thrown on the sticky clay floor, served as a dry walk through the passage. It was oppressively still and close—not even an echo of their foot-falls could be heard. Their way wound in and out, down rough ladders and up rougher ones. Once they entered a huge, rock-ribbed chamber, hollowed from the very centre of the earth, it seemed. A few men were working here, and the drill-noises reverberated strangely throughout the massive, ghostly place. At one end a drift ran slopingly, and to this the guide bent his steps. A narrow railway threaded through this downward passage, and occasionally a little box-like iron car would be met, freighted with yellow, ugly lumps of ore. The drift was well lighted, but the explorers were forced to cling to the walls for fear of a too-sudden collision with the swift going cars. Finally, after traversing innumerable tunnels with their short side-issues to constantly confuse, the guide announced they had reached the fourth level, where the chief work was being carried on. Here there were smaller drifts with a few men in each. In some places a white fungus clung to the wet, unsteady props, and there were frequent illustrations of a serious mine "cave," where the heavy earth had broken through the old, unreliable timbers and closed up the temporary, artificial gaps, made by the daily labor of man. It was in these old workings that the recent strike had been accidentally made. A miner, having occasion to go to one end of the insecure catacomb-like place, had caused the earth to fall, by a slight jar, and, rolling down, it revealed a solid block of what seemed undoubtedly, in the somewhat affrighted man's eyes, ore of at least greater value than the Major was just then getting.

"The discovery in the Horn Spoon will prove the most novel, the most phenomenal," said Hanlon, enthusiastically, "in the history of mining, when it becomes known."

From the location of the strike to the shaft, the passage was almost straight, and ran gradually down. It was slippery and damp, and much more difficult to travel than by the circuitous route from the third level. The little iron cars shrieked with a rusty, dismal cadence as they rattled by, seeming like huge, winged bats scudding through the darkness, while the candles flickered and sputtered, and always seemed on the verge of going out. Despite the mortise-jointed timbers the place appeared very insecure.

A long, low wail, evidently intended for a cheery "hullo!" reached the ears of the party.

Dorris shuddered and Gladys gave a little frightened scream.

"It's only the Major," explained Hanlon, "he's coming on and wants us to wait; that's the way a voice sounds a long distance underground."

They stopped, Dorris and Penn walking on a few steps ahead of the others, and pausing beside the bended figure of a man, who was repairing some defect in the small steel rails. He was so intent upon the performance of his delicate duty that he did not look up to note who the spectators were. Under his swift blows the small bits of steel sent out a ringing, cheerful sound—the only noise they had heard in the mine that did not partially frighten them. Once he placed his lantern on the track just in front of him, and its rays fell across his mud-stained face, revealing the outline of his featues with a sudden distinctness that caused Penn to fall against the muddy wall in alarm as he recognized them. His train of thought, quick and lucid, was scarcely comforting. The kneeling man was Francois Ferri; behind him stood the woman he had crossed the waters and scaled the mountains to kill; if she spoke he would recognize her; if he glanced up he would know both figures standing over him; if Penn spoke the recognition would as quickly follow. The situation was peculiar and decidedly alarming to the novelist. Some distance up the drift he could see the figures of Aumerle, Gladys and Hanlon, grotesque in the feeble candle-light. Still further back, small, minute pieces of flame seemed to dance about in the darkness—the light of the Major's party as they advanced slowly. One candle did service for both Dorris and Escanes, the latter holding it by his side. As he looked down, he noted with increased alarm that the miner's task was almost finished—the tightening of a screw would see it completed. Dorris was watching the work with an interest born of its novelty, and was even bending over the form of the stooping boy. There was no time to reason—the quickest way out, without discovery, was the thought uppermost with Escanes. He gently extinguished the flame of his candle, and pushed the round, white piece of tallow into one of the many little holes in the side of the drift. Then, half-stumblingly, he advanced toward the lantern and kicked it down the passage, breaking the glass and causing the flame to blaze and then suddenly vanish.

The man was on his feet in an instant.

"How stupid of me," said Penn, with forced calmness, disguising his natural intonation as best he could. "Those confounded little rails have been a constant annoyance to me ever since we were down here. I sincerely beg your pardon, my man, and trust I have not frightened you."

"Et es all right—I am stupid for not to let you pass," returned the boy, in a low expressionless tone. "I will get another," and he moved up towards the grotesque figures, passing them with a quaint gesture and then moving on.

"These rails *are* abominable," said Dorris, unsteadily; "but how you upset me!"

"I am extremely sorry," returned Penn, in a voice that flatly contradicted his statement. "My candle has fallen here somewhere."

He found it in the little nook at last, and lighted it. He was very pale, and his hand quite unsteady.

" We may as well walk on," he said; " there is nothing more to see, I believe, and the shaft cannot be far away."

So they passed down the drift, followed, before they had proceeded far, by their companions.

The cage was standing at the entrance to the level when they reached it, and Penn stepped on the platform without ceremony, followed by Dorris. Jo, very quiet and rather pale, decided she would go up with the first party. Her journey underground had been one of almost constant terror.

" I feel just as though the whole world was coming down on me, every minute," she declared at intervals, during her progress through the mine. " Isn't it awful? "

But, when a great golden streak of light shot down to meet the cage as it neared the opening of the shaft, there was one even more thankful than Jo to see the brown old shaft-house with its whirring machinery.

PART IV.

AT THE END OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

REVELATIONS IN A DOG CART.

EARLY the following day Penn made a special visit to the mine. The men were just preparing to go down for their day's work, and among them was Francois.

"Ah! et es Monsieur!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically. "You see I have come down to the work once more," he added, with his customary shrug.

"Work will never hurt you," retorted Penn, dryly. "If you had been working all your life instead of running wild over the world on your fool's errand, you would have been better for it."

"My fool's errand, as you have say, es a mission," said the boy, clinching his hands and drawing his body erect. "Et es a duty I owe to myself."

"Then you should have become disgusted, by this time, in attempting to pay the debt. What have you gained by running away from me, as you did?"

"Nothing," returned the boy, sullenly. "My money, which was a little, so very little, Monsieur, did I spend for your cursed American railroad tickets—the railroad take all my money; every sou since I come to this country."

"Nothing remarkable in that. Your varied tastes for travelling would command a pretty heavy pull on the pocket-book of a millionaire. Well, you were stranded—where?"

"In the Pueblo. Then did I see the—what you call the advertisement for men to work in the mine. I was destitute, Monsieur; I ask for the situation, and get it. They send me here."

"You have, then, given up your insane 'mission,' as you call it?"

"Not for always, Monsieur—not for always. But I must have money—I must work."

"Where do you think this individual you so persistently seek has gone?"

"To the south, I have believe. She has seen me, and will go as far away as et es possible. She will try to escape, but——"

"There, stop that. You get too excited by far without provocation. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. If you are so firmly convinced that you cannot die peacefully without first having seen your interesting young woman, I believe the best plan is to search her out. As you say, she probably *has* gone south. I am willing to furnish you with all the money you require to follow her. Only stick to the south—she is undoubtedly down there somewhere."

"Monsieur es too good—too kind," cried the boy, seizing Penn's hands.

"Perhaps so. You had better leave as quickly as possible; the stage goes early this afternoon. Be at Gibson at noon, at the hotel, and I will meet you."

Francois would have continued his customary effusive attacks, but Penn waved him back with a half disgusted gesture, and left the place.

He worried through the remainder of the morning impatiently. Now that the solution of his great problem was at hand, he was less inclined than ever to take the necessary steps toward its *eclaircissement.* The mere sight of Francois, even at a distance, might, he considered, draw the whole story from Dorris. Yet, strangely enough, that was just what he proposed should not occur. A recognition would undoubtedly be fatal. And, in truth, he was beginning to think it best to let the whole thing go. Miss Marston had injured him in no way, She was certainly not fortune-hunting, despite the peculiar methods she had been pursuing. and as for her little masquerade in Leadville—well, perhaps it was a stupendous joke that would be explained in time. At any rate, he would wait until she explained it—he would not frighten a confession of any sort from her. She might murder a hundred husbands for all he cared.

Then, as was customary, he went over the entire unsatisfactory one-sided story again, ending with its perplexing proposition.

He had the brown pony harnessed to the dog-cart early in the afternoon. When it was driven to the door Mrs. Sowders was sitting on the veranda.

"Do you go to Gibson?" she questioned of Penn, as the latter drew on his gloves.

"Yes," he returned. "I shall be gone for some time."

"What an opportunity for Dorris!" exclaimed the little woman, "Why, she was about to have her horse saddled in order to get to Gibson before the stage left. We have a number of letters to mail."

Dorris came downstairs just then, and, noting the neat cart through the open door, went out on to the veranda.

"I was just saying you might ride to Gibson with Mr. Escanes—that is, if he don't mind, and I'm sure he don't," explained Mrs. Sowders.

"I might take the letters myself," said Penn, hastily, "and so save Miss Marston the trouble."

"It is not the letters alone I am going for," remarked Dorris with a trifle of annoyance. "It's very necessary that I should---should go for other reasons."

She was apparently confused and not a little vexed.

"Is your own business so very important?" she asked. "Because if it isn't I could transact it as well; there is no necessity for your going, and I might take Gladys with me. She said she was dying to ride but was afraid to drive alone—Gladys is so peculiar about horses, you know."

"I cannot possibly defer my trip or I would give the dog-cart over to you—and the errand I go on can be transacted by no other." He might have added "you least of all," and been entirely correct.

It was plainly evident that Miss Marston had every desire to keep Mr. Escanes from going to Gibson. It was equally evident that Mr. Escanes strongly desired Miss Marston to abandon her proposed visit. And it was visibly apparent that both had decided to and must make the trip.

"Gladys can wait," said Mrs. Sowders. "It is evidently a case of necessity with both of you, and you have the method of conveyance at the door. Put on your hat, Dorris."

Dorris entered the house and shortly returned, ready for the ride. Penn assisted her in the wagon without a word and drove slowly on, amid a silence most oppressive. After they had turned in the road, leaving the house some distance behind, its quaint roof just to be discerned amid the poplar trees, Penn said:

"I have every reason in the world to wish you would not go to Gibson to-day, Miss Marston."

"And I have every reason to wish the same with respect to yourself," she returned.

"We are each deep in a mystery, evidently. Mine I cannot explain."

"Nor I mine. However, I shall ask you to leave me at the hotel, and then you may transact your business—or unravel your mystery, whatever it is, and I will not trouble you."

"I am going to the hotel myself."

Miss Marston uttered a little exclamation of alarm. She had turned quite pale, and sank against the cushions with an air of helplessness.

"Is it so serious with you? It is a matter of life and death with me," he said with an effort at calmness. He was wondering what Francois would do when he saw this woman. One thing was settled—Penn would protect her from any mad attack on the part of the boy—and then, he might not see her; a meeting could possibly be avoided.

"It is almost that with me," replied Miss Marston.

"I am going to see a friend who leaves by the early stage."

Miss Marston had thoroughly calmed herself.

"That is also my mission," she said. Then followed silence, Penn attempting, in a bewildered, disordered fashion, to think coherently.

"In a case like this," he said after a time, "the only way to manage, is to let matters take their course."

"I suppose so," she replied. "I don't

fancy, however, either of us will be pleased with the course. I was wondering if it were possible that we were both going to see the same person."

"It is not unlikely," he said. "Affairs have been running so sensationally with me of late that I shouldn't be at all surprised at any course events would take."

He turned desperately in his seat and looked straight at her.

"I am going to see a boy—Francois Ferri."

"Then it is not the same person." She seemed really relieved.

Penn was thoroughly astounded. "I am going to see the Major," would have had no more effect than the words he had used.

"Do you mean to say you never heard of Francois Ferri?" he asked pointedly.

"I never heard the name before in my life,' she said. "Whoever he is, he must be a total stranger to me."

"I was almost certain he knew you.

"Then he has the advantage," she said simply.

With the exception of a few desultory remarks, *apropos* to nothing in particular, conversation was then practically suspended. Escanes, half-angry for showing his hand, and getting really no satisfaction in return, touched the pony viciously with the red whip, and the little animal started down the white road at a lively trot. Occasionally small, brown snakes, harmless but decidedly repulsive, would wriggle to the roadside as the vehicle ran along, and striped chattering squirrels on the fences seemed to scold at the yellow wheels and gay decorations of the cart. Tiny, highly-colored birds buzzed, bee-like, around the columbines and mallows. The sun was never brighter, the trees never more cheerful, with their soft rustling leaves, the mountains never more silently majestic.

Yet it might have been the blackest night to the occupants of the dog-cart. A ride across a desert would have been as attractive and eventful as their little journey that afternoon. They were riding down the main street of the mining camp almost before they were aware they had left Potter House. Penn stopped at the hotel steps and his companion sprang lightly from the low carriage. His first nervous look was for Francois, and the youth's conspicuous absence afforded him a great deal of relief. Tying the pony at one end of the porch, he turned to enter the office.

To his surprise Miss Marston had remained there—evidently waiting.

"Will you come with me?" she asked, half-fearfully, as though he would refuse. "You have told me why you came here—I would now like to explain my mission to you. If your friend can wait, will you come?"

"He is not here," replied Penn. "Yes, I will go with you."

"Show us to room 6," she said, turning to the expectant clerk.

Up a wide, uncarpeted staircase, along a distressingly bare, narrow hall, and a light rap on a shaky door, followed by a half-suppressed "come in."

The room was not attractive. Like the majority of apartments in mining-camp hotels, it was distinguished for its scant furniture and wall paper of remarkable pattern. There was a bed, a washstand and a desk. At one of the windows stood a young woman—a very young, slight, delicate woman, who had turned, expectantly, toward the door. Penn glanced at the figure by the window, and then at the one by his side. A great light shone in his eyes a stifled, but thankful, cry broke from him—a cry almost echoed in tone by the first occupant of the room. He reeled and caught at the door to steady himself. Miss Marston's voice came as from a long, a very long, distance.

"Mr. Escanes—my sister—Mrs. Terris."

He knew that he managed to bow; that both ladies seemed greatly confused; that the likeness between them was remarkable—and that he must have air. He muttered something about the stifling condition of the room, opened the door and stumbled along the hall and down the stairs into the office. He tried to laugh, but failed. He wondered why it affected him so—this sudden breaking, sudden solving of his sphinx mystery. He could only feel thankful—thankful and nothing more. He remembered in a misty, dim way that night on the heights at Leadville when he had been similarly affected—when the events had been brought about almost as they were now.

"Monsieur."

It was Francois.

Then his mind suddenly cleared.

CHAPTER II.

FRANCOIS PURCHASES SOAP.

" Ah, you are here

He must have shown the effects of his shock, for the boy said.

" Monsieur is ill."

" Monsieur was never better in his life," he returned sharply.

" On thinking the matter over, Francois, I am of the opinion you had better not leave—just at present. You will need something of a travelling outfit, and I cannot supply you before the stage leaves. You had better defer your departure until to-morrow ! "

" Et will be as Monsieur wishes," said the boy respectfully, but with an intonation of disappointment. " Monsieur knows what es best."

Monsieur flattered himself that he did know what was best occasionally. The lumbering stage coach drew up before the door and there was a rustle of skirts on the stairway. Dorris was coming down, and directly behind her was a slight form in a drab travelling dress. Monsieur was in a fix.

"I wish you'd go down to Pink's store for me," he said, pushing the boy through the doorway.

Pink's store was very far down the street, and the stage would have left by the time Francois returned.

"*Oui*, Monsieur, presently." He had started toward the office, where he had left his dirty little valise.

"No, not presently, but at once—I've got to have them. I'll take care of your satchel." He held him by the shoulder and dragged him to the end of the porch.

"Quick, here—here's the money," nervously shoving a dollar into the boy's hands, "now be off."

Francois started down the street. The two ladies came from the office and stood beside the coach while the trunks were being placed on the outer seats. Dorris' sister had a heavy veil covering the face, and betrayed nervousness in every movement. She finally stepped inside the coach. Penn looked up the road. To his horror he saw Francois running back, and with a vague idea of cutting his throat or doing something equally as bad—anything to stop him, he rushed out and met the lad.

"Monsieur did not say what I was to buy," he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Buy soap!" screamed Penn, turning the boy around, "buy soap, and buy it d—- quick, for I need it badly. Run!"

"*Mon Dieu*, he has the insane," thought the amazed messenger as he started off quickly, "he has surely the insane."

The great dusty coach rolled slowly off down the street, and Penn returned to the veranda.

"We had better start for Potter House at once," he said decidedly, untying the strap holding the pony. He realized that the danger was far from being over, for should Francois return and see Dorris—well, the prospect was too alarming to be considered.

When they were seated he drove up the street like mad, thoroughly surprising the little brown pony and causing Miss Marston to open her eyes widely.

"You are evidently in a great hurry," she commented.

"Am I—well, yes—no—yes," he stammered "I wasn't thinking what I was doing."

He began to laugh mildly at his little stratagem and was in a sort of nervous good-humor during the drive home. They talked idly for awhile after leaving the camp behind, and then, after a pause, she looked up resolutely and said:

"I have something to tell you—something, I suppose, that should have been told long ago to some one, but somehow I never met the person I thought I could trust—I believe, Mr. Escanes, I may trust you."

Penn nodded.

"You flatter me. I am prepared for the worst."

"It is not so very terrible—at least I do not think so. Your opinion may differ—it usually does."

She was now looking at the white road in front of them.

"My mission to Gibson to-day," she began, "was, as you now know, to see my sister. In the eyes of the world—when the world cares to turn its eyes in her direction—she is a very bad woman, a wicked woman. I have no regard for my sister—that is, no especial affection. We made our entrance into the world together, and played together as children. Her name is Dorothy, mine, as you know, Dorris. We bear a resemblance striking, yet perfectly natural. At an early age, Dorothy and myself were left parentless and were taken under the protection of our Uncle Paul, of whom you have doubtless heard me speak. Our life was not a pleasant one. Uncle Paul was very rich, very disagreeable, and usually, unjust. We were both treated as dependents from the first. Dorothy, who was proud even to resentfulness, felt keenly the position in which she was placed. One day, when Uncle Paul was more severe than usual, he taunted her with her poverty, and she, scarcely deigning to answer him, quitted the house and never entered it again. She was but 15 at the time and wholly inexperienced. 'Let her go,' stormed my Uncle, 'she will be the better for it, the beggar; she is now where she belongs—in the street.' I attempted to search her out—it was impossible. Two years later we learned she had gone to London, having adopted the stage as a profession. Later we heard, indirectly, that she had married a wealthy Englishman, John Terris, by name. Next came the report—just after Uncle Paul died, willing me his fortune and entirely ignoring my sister—that Terris had died in the south of France. There could have been little affection in the marriage, for a month later an old admirer who, I believe, had something to do with the beginning of her stage career, led her to the altar. This was Paul Bartow, an American. She failed in an attempt to get any part of her first husband's estate, for he left a will, evidently formulated before his marriage, giving his entire property to other relatives. The fight was a bitter one. You may have heard of it through the English papers. An attempt to communicate with my sister failed, and for nearly a year I lost track of her completely. While we were in Manitou a few weeks ago I received, one day, a telegram dated Leadville, and signed by Dorothy. She represented that she was in deep distress and requested me to go to her; I did so, and this was the errand that called Mrs. Sowders and myself to the city—although Auntie knew nothing of my real mission. Dorothy had resumed the stage—the concert-hall stage, it transpired. Her husband, a worthless scamp, deserted her in London and afterward suicided. The unfortunate girl was almost poverty-stricken and scarcely in the best of health. She was my sister, Mr. Escanes, and a woman—I provided for her, sending her south. To my most intense surprise, I received, the day before yesterday, a note dated at the Gibson hotel, informing me that she had arrived there, and that it was important she should see me. She was almost prostrated from terror, the reason for which she would not inform me, although I pleaded with her earnestly. She stated she desired to go to France to remain—'it is the only place where I may live in safety' she said wildly. I at once arranged that she should go. Briefly, Mr. Escanes, this is my story."

Penn had whipped the horse into a gallop.

"Miss Marston," he said, "you are a noble and just woman. The developments to-day have not only interested, but relieved me more than you can possibly believe, for you do not understand under what horrible delusion I have been struggling."

He would have said more, but they were almost in front of the Major's quaint house, and Mrs. Sowders was calling out a cheery greeting.

"We have had rather an exciting afternoon," he said, as Miss Marston went up the steps.

"Rather a peculiar afternoon, you should say—scarcely exciting," she returned.

But he considered it so, despite her assertion. It had been exciting, he felt, in more ways than one.

* * * * *

When the stage rolled slowly by Pink's grocery, Francois was just coming from the door of that important business house. It has been a long established fact that any person and of any nationality, will stop while a railway train or a stage coach passes. Francois, with his large square bundle in his arms, stood between the road and the little store, and drank in the huge, dirty spectacle of mountain transit method. There was one passenger—a young woman, veiled, who shrank against the seat and gave a gasp of terror as she saw the face of the boy by the roadside. He noted it too—just enough to wonder, as he passed on, what could have caused it. There seemed to be something very familiar about it—-it was just such a cry as he had heard on two occasions, one stormy night in Monsieur's room at the St. Mathilde inn.

He walked very slowly, his head bent in thought.

No—he could not be wrong—none other could utter a cry like that.

He paused, turned, and looked at the coach as it was wheeled around a curve in the road, and lost behind the willows.

"That was Madam," thought he. Madam—and she was here."

His thoughts never came so slowly in his life before. The usual insane impulsiveness, on which he so frequently acted, seemed to have deserted him. It was doubtful, even had Madam appeared in the road before him at that very minute, if he would have harmed her. It was doubtful if he would have reproached her.

Suddenly he turned again and walked resolutely toward the hotel.

* * * * *

Jo, who seldom found anything in particular to do just about sun-down was seated upon the revolving gate by the road, making a spectacular exhibition of herself, according to Gladys, who looked down on her discouragingly from an upper window.

"There is not a soul in the wide world," called out Miss Josephine in return for a doubly sarcastic remark from her estimable sister, "who knows I am swinging on this gate. You are horrid to spoil my fun. I cannot make a 'spec-t'ular exposition' of myself anyway, where there is no audience."

There was a ridiculously half-suppressed titter by the side of the fence just then and a wail of horror from the hoydenish young woman.

"Oh, how horrid of you!"

"W—well," stammered the very minute individual thus addressed, 'you see I c—couldn't help it. Y—you were yellin' an' I rapped twice on the fence to let you know that I w—was here. Y—you needn't git mad—betcherlife *I* ain't agoin' to tell everybody in the camp."

"You're horrid enough to do anything. Do you know," she said suddenly, going out into the path and seizing the youngster by the shoulders, "do you know, I believe you're the same little boy that threw rocks at my horse when I was riding the other day? And I was afraid of that horrid horse, too!"

"I never," angrily remonstrated the dirty-faced young man, "I never threw rocks at any lady or any horse."

He resorted to the pathetic, and let a large package he was carrying fall into the dust.

"I didn't *accuse* you of it—I only *alleged*. You're not to suppose I mean what I said. Penn says accuse and allege are perfectly distinct from each other. If you *accuse* a man, he may thump the editor, but if you only *allege*, why then he has no grounds to get mad on—anyhow that's what Penn was explaining the other day."

"I don't know what you mean," remarked the dirty boy honestly, "and I don't think you do yourself."

"I guess you're right—I *was* sort of mystified when Penn was telling it, but every one laughed, so I suppose it was very funny."

"Dinner, Jo," called Gladys from the window.

"What have you there," queried Miss Josephine, alluding to the fallen package.

"It's for Mr. Penn Escanes, and is *very important*," responded the boy, clutching a note tightly in his fat hands. "It's very heavy too," he added.

"I should think so," said Jo, stooping to take the parcel from the ground. Thc paper parted and twelve neat little packages rolled out and distributed themselves variously over the roadway.

"Why, it's soap!" she exclaimed, starting back.

"And are you so unfamiliar with the article that it causes a shock of that nature when you see it in quantities," queried Penn quietly, as he came down the steps.

"I didn't mean it that way—but it was so odd," she remarked. Then, going into the yard and turning the gate: "I would advise you, Mr. Escanes, to have your *very important* packages more securely sealed when they are sent by private messenger."

Penn opened the note the boy had extended:

"MONSIEUR—I find I am deceived by all—everyone. I have seen Madame. I go to meet her. I send you by this boy your soap—a result of another what you have called fool's errand. This time I go on no fool's path—I go my own, and I shall meet Madame. I am grateful, Monsieur, for your kindness—I shall accept of it no more.

"FRANCOIS FERRI."

"There is no answer, young man—for you to carry at any rate," said Penn, looking down at the expectant face. "I don't suppose he paid you—here's some money."

And the urchin scampered off, after a vain endeavor to get a glance at Jo through the open window.

There was a great deal to be done in little time. The stage must have nearly reached the End of the World about the time Penn received the note, and—well, something most interesting and sensational might be occurring there while he stood regarding the fruit of Francois' errand to the grocery. The events of the summer had re-taught Escanes something he had completely forgotten—quick action in cases of emergency, often prevented serious crimes. In ten minutes the household knew that he had received an important dispatch and must go to the station. In five minutes more, just as the edge of the sun was visible against the mountain tops to the west he was riding furiously down the gulch.

CHAPTER III.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES MEET.

When California Dave drew up before the neat hotel by the railway station, he was just twenty minutes ahead of time, despite what he had feared would cause a delay some miles back by the breaking of the harness. He had every occasion to feel good-humored. Madam, whom he assisted into the hotel parlor, was rather weak, rather nervous, and rather white, but she gave him a quiet "thank you" that went straight to his heart. She was a dainty little woman, and seemed so very tired.

"I will have yer traps sent over t' the depot," said Dave gently.

"You are very kind—I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged," she said, looking up tiredly.

So, swelling with big-hearted enthusiasm, he walked out whistling.

A dirty, white, dusty figure was just creeping out from under the big canvas trunk-cover behind the stage.

"So yer stole a ride, did yer?" queried Dave. He tried to be harsh, but Madam's soft "thank you" had driven all harshness from his nature for the time.

"Yes," said the figure, dejectedly.

"Well, I s'pose I ought ter report ye, but yer needed th' ride, I guess—whare'd yer git on at?"

"At Sedgewick, where you stopped. I walked from Gibson."

"What might yer name be."

"Francois."

"Thet's French, ain't it?"

"Oui, Monsieur."

"We, Musuer!" Dave laughed very loudly. "Don't 'we' me—I ain't of that kind, see? Jest yer git 'long now—yer might have rid on th' seat with me ef ye'd had th' gimp ter ask."

At his request, Francois gave him a "lift" with the "luggage," and then went inside. At the parlor door he stopped. The evening was just falling, and there were semi-penetrable shadows in the corners of the room. Madam had thrown aside her hat and travelling wraps, and was shaking the dust from them. He stumbled as he reached the threshold, and she looked up. Through the gathering darkness their eyes seemed to blaze like dull coals fanned to life after the heat had apparently died out. For a long time they regarded one another—Francois, leaning against the open door, Madam with her cloak, which she had been dusting, half raised. She finally stepped forward—after they had been standing nearly half an hour.

"You have come to kill me, I suppose," she said, scarcely loud enough to be heard. "I have expected it ever since—ever since I left France. I saw you in Leadville—you wanted to kill me there."

Then she went nearer to him—stood directly before him and threw the cloak to the ground.

"You may kill me now, if you wish to. I suppose I deserve it. Well, I am ready!"

She spoke as though she had prepared herself for an ordeal for which she was destined—as though she was a criminal sentenced to the guillotine and the time for death was at hand. It was a move, above all others, for which her would-be executioner was wholly unprepared.

"You are ready for death?" he gasped, "and like that?"

"I am ready for anything," she answered in Francois' native tongue. It was a home-thrust on her part, too, this unconscious change from English to French. He repeated the words again and again, as though they were delicious sweetmeats, murmuring spasmodically, "*France—la Belle France!*"

The hot ride was telling upon him. The events of the day seemed to have turned his brain. He laughed deliriously, and, seizing her hand, covered it with dry kisses.

"You have called me back to my France—to my beautiful France," he said, wildly. "I will not kill you; do you hear? I came to kill, too—it is so strange I should not—want—to."

He reeled over to a chair and sank back upon it, covering his face with his arms.

"I would rather kill myself—any one in all the world," he muttered, "than you. And yet I would have every reason to kill you of all others."

She went to his side and placed her hands upon his dusty hair.

"You are ill," she said, in French; "you are ill, and are exciting yourself."

Then he started up, clutching the chair and taking a step toward the door.

"I cannot kill you," he said, facing her; "I cannot kill you because—because I love you."

Then his arms trembled violently, his knees quivered, and he fell to the floor with a weary sigh, a dusty, awkward heap.

Madame ran for assistance and stumbled over a tall figure in the hallway. It was quite dark and there were no lamps. She felt her arm seized, and managed to gasp, considerably frightened:

"Won't you please come into the parlor, whoever you are? A friend of mine has been taken suddenly ill."

The tall man, who was evidently greatly

excited and out of breath, walked directly into the room. Leaning over the inanimate form of the boy he looked sharply up at Madam and asked:

"Ill—or dead?"

He had not expected this.

"I think he has fainted," she replied, unmindful of the thrust.

"You say a friend of yours?"

"Yes—please assist me."

Penn went out for the landlord and shortly the boy was in a warm bed, tossing about half-consciously. The woman was everywhere. She sent some one for flannels and some one for a doctor, while Penn obeyed her commands at the bedside, amazed at her deftness and promptness.

"He is very feverish, I fear," she said, bending over him once and stroking the flushed face. The invalid might have been a very dear friend indeed, from the concern she showed.

"The train leaves in ten minutes," said Dave, opening the door rudely, and causing both watchers by the bed to start, " yer haven t much time."

"I am not going to-night," she replied quietly, "you may have my baggage returned to the hotel."

Then the physician entered the room, and for a time Penn and Madam were busily employed obeying his instructions. He went away finally, after having given commands and countermands, ordering absolute quietness in the apartment, above all things. The night lamp suffused the plain little room with a melancholy light, throwing a shade upon the restless sleeper on the bed.

"I must insist," said Escanes gently, "on your retiring at once. You have spent a very tiresome day, and the ride alone was enough to wear upon you. I will watch here."

"You are very kind," was the soft reply, "but I cannot do as you wish—somehow I felt as though it were my duty to remain here until he is better. Besides, you must have spent fully as weary a day as myself. My—my sister has spoken to me of you—you brought her to Gibson this morning, you know. The day has been a very eventful one with me—a very surprising one. Do you know, I believe our wickedness follows us to every corner of the earth and confronts us in the most unexpected places?"

She scarcely knew why she said this, but somehow, she found the words a great relief.

She looked remarkably like Dorris, as she stood there. The little gestures, evidently of French origin, were her only distinguishing features.

"And I too know of you—and something about you. I need not disguise it—Francois confided in me."

She uttered a sharp little cry of pain. Then, somewhat feebly:

"I suppose you consider me a very bad woman, then—for that matter I suppose I am. Mr. Escanes, I have been a follower of folly all my life. I have been very wicked all my life. I have sinned in more ways than one. I suppose *he* told you, among other things, of that horrible affair at St. Mathilde." She shivered, although the room was quite hot. "I am not wholly guilty of the terrible end of it—I did not—believe me, Mr. Escanes, I did not—*kill* him. He was behind me in it all—my husband, threatening, adjuring, warning. But it was he, Mr. Escanes, it was *he* who finished the work." She uttered the words in jerky little sentences, and leaned, with her eyes half closed, against the table for support.

He was at her side in an instant.

"Do not attempt to explain, I beg of you. *I* do not care for what you are, for what you have been. There is an unwritten law requiring forgiveness at least, if not pardon, for all crimes. It is not always obeyed, but I am one of the few honoring it. Believe me, I will ever respect you for the good I am confident you can and will do—for the good you have begun this very night. Of this French affair of which you speak your sister is ignorant—through me, she will never learn it. I—I admire your sister, Mrs. Terris, and such tidings would be distressing to her—unnecessarily distressing, I think I may say. One thing I will ask you—tell all to *him*," nodding toward the bed. "When he is in a condition to listen, explain the matter to him."

She pressed his hands warmly.

"I believe the world would be better if there were more as lenient as you. You cannot thoroughly realize what you are doing—looking lightly on errors in a life the world would shudder at. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

There were tears glistening on her eyelashes as she bent over the white hands.

"Pray do not distress yourself," said he, "and let me again entreat you to retire for a few hours at least. I can rest, you see, in this great arm-chair."

She remonstrated again, but finally, noting he was so earnest in his solicitation, withdrew, leaving him at the bedside of the feverish, tossing, dark-skinned boy.

Toward morning the figure on the bed rocked violently under the white covers, and the pinkish white lips uttered disconnected, half-intelligible words. They were all of France—France and the roses, St. Mathilde and the chateau; then of Madam, but not a word against her—"forgive, forgive," came gaspingly now and again.

Thus it was all the night and all the day, although he seemed quieter when Madam, refreshed by her night's rest, came to the bedside and gently stroked his hair or patted the hot hands. The doctor came and went frequently, shaking his head negatively each time he departed. He was a fussy little gentleman, not greatly skilled, it was rumored, but the only physician at the End of the World.

When the night-shadows began to fall once more, Francois was conscious, although very weak. He pressed Madam's little hand encouragingly, and asked to be raised on the pillows. When his request was granted, he looked at her long and earnestly. She spoke to him in French, and his eyes brightened.

"I wish you would tell me," he said, musically, "tell me that it was not you. I would like to think that it was not you—that it was *him* instead—that you were too good—too honest."

"It was not I," she returned lowly, as though she wished to please him.

"Thank you, Madam—I am so grateful. I would kiss your hand, Madam, but I feel so tired—so very, very tired."

Then he began repeating: "I did not think it was all your doing—somehow I thought you were too good," reiterating it many times.

He looked, at last, through the open window at the hills, made purple by the lingering, mellow rays of sunlight.

"It is France," he muttered, "beautiful France."

He was looking at the hills as the light faded from his eyes and his hand, in Madam's, turned cold and still.

CHAPTER IV.

It was an unpretentious, almost pathetic, little funeral, yet it seemed, singularly enough. really appropriate to the end of a lonesome life. When the mild-faced, soft-voiced clergyman had gone, when the sexton had filled the dry earth into a little mound and placed the customary white board to make the head of the grave, Madam and Penn stood over the yellow heap for a long time without speaking, busy with their minds' panoramic pictures. When she looked over at him her eyes were moist and her voice trembled.

"It seems," she said, sorrowfully, "as though very few of us really get the infliction we deserve. Here is one whose only sins have been caused by the unpunished woman who stands over him. I cannot bring myself to believe that the hand of death, so gruesome as we fancy and often believe it, has sought the right person in this instance."

"And do you believe death to be the great, the supreme penalty for the errors of your life? Do you imagine it so terrible after you have seen his life go out as it did? Have you not suffered? Ah, Madam, we all have a conscience, that invisible, torturous thing beside which death would be a relief. It is strange you, of all others, should not have learned this. For my own part I cannot conceive of a better ending of your unfortunate stay at St. Mathilde, sorrowful as it is. You are not a woman to take things lightly—this, I know, has sunk into your heart, and you will be the better for its transpiring."

He led her away then, and the little mound was left to itself, hiding the sad story of a life not understood.

"It is hardly possible we shall meet again," said she softly, "I thank you, more than my words can express, for your kindness toward one so—so unfortunate, you are considerate enough to call it. I know you will think of me, once in a while—I cannot expect you to forget me, and I only hope you will think of me as kindly as you can."

"It will always be kindly," he answered earnestly "always that."

* * * * *

"One week more," sighed Gladys rather mournfully, when they were all assembled in the parlor that evening, like a huge family reunited. They seemed to have paired-off; an evening custom that somehow caused no comment. The Major, who had never been fully successful in defining chutes and upraises to Mrs. Sowders, was earnestly engaged, for the three hundred and second consecutive time, in endeavoring to make the mining subject clear—it seemed essentially important to the Major that it should be made clear. He never became impatient during these little lessons, for although he invariably had to commence at the beginning every time, he was wonderfully persevering. Gladys and Aumerle, seated, juvenile fashion, in the large open window, studied the moon. It was a paramount necessity, evidently, that they should know everything about the orb, for they seemed more wonderfully engrossed with it each succeeding night. Jo and Herrick, like practical people in love, talked somewhat sensibly on the sofa. Over at the rosewood piano was Dorris, and seated beside her, Escanes.

"She says one week more," remarked Penn lowly, "one week more of our eventful summer."

"It has passed quickly, hasn't it," she said; "so very quickly that it seems almost beyond comprehension. It has been a very happy summer, too."

"Yes--in all but one respect."

He might have said ten respects and been nearer the truth. She lifted her eyebrows expressively.

"And that?"

He arose and leaned over the key-board.

"Miss Marston, you must have seen that my association with you this summer meant, after a time, something more than mere friendship—that, daily, I could barely resist an admiration that grew greater and greater. I—"

She had turned quite pale.

"Don't, she pleaded, "please don't say any more. I know just what you mean —just what you were going to say."

"I suppose others have said it before," he remarked wearily, but with no accent of reproach.

"Yes, others *have* said it, for that matter. I will not deny that I entertain for you a feeling of the utmost regard, Mr. Escanes—a feeling akin to something you would have mentioned, had you proceeded. You wish me to marry you—I cannot."

"May I ask why?"

She was looking silently at the keys and unconsciously pressed her fingers down, producing a frightful discord.

"Is it your sister, Dorris?"

"Yes," very low.

"I am not marrying your sister.

"Do you remember our conversation in the parlor one night—the night Auntie lost her lace-work and I went down to find it? Do you remember what you said about--about actresses and leading double lives."

He remembered---very vividly.

"That is not the subject we are treating now," he said.

"Would you care--really care, Mr. Escanes, to marry into a family in which there was a social monster of your own description?"

He was laughing now—rather happily, it seemed.

"I would not hesitate an instant," he said quietly. "Not an instant. Especially when there was a social angel like you to counterbalance the 'monster' as you put it—although I assure you she is far from being anything of that order. Now I am going to ask you something—will you be my wife? Please don't say it's 'sudden' or anything of that sort—it's customary, I believe, but it wouldn't be right. Say 'yes' or 'no' but don't let it be 'no'."

The Mayor was holding Mrs. Sowder's hand, ostensibly to illustrate the angle of inclination of an ore lead in the mine.

Aumerle had placed his arm around Gladys, just for an instant, to draw her nearer to his side of the window, from which point of view a peculiar shaped cloud was more plainly visible, drifting across the face of the moon.

Jo and Herrick were speaking in such low tones that one might almost have accused them of whispering.

The room was intensely still, yet only one person heard a faintly murmured 'yes' as a slender hand slipped into a stronger and sturdier one, and only two knew just what occurred immediately thereafter.

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